

**Does image-focussed media contribute to the development of
disordered eating behaviours among women between the ages of
15 and 45?**

By

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ABSTRACT

This study asks the question: *Does image-focussed media contribute to the development of disordered eating behaviours among women between the ages of 15 and 45?* It examines the issue of female body image and how the media can influence women between the ages of 15 and 45. Three sub-questions are presented for this study also, they are: *(i) Do fashion magazines and their online counterparts induce self-objectification among women aged 15-45? (ii) Do the images in fashion magazines and their online versions directly contribute to the development of disordered eating behaviours among women between the ages of 15 and 45? (iii) Do the images in fashion magazines and their online versions contribute to social comparison among this age group?*

The study is done in an effort to understand if exposure to image-focussed media can contribute to the development of disordered eating behaviours among women of the aforementioned age group. These behaviours include internalisation of the thin-ideal, body dissatisfaction and objectification. In order to answer these questions fully a specific research design was implemented. Previous works in the field of media and body image were consulted, a content analysis of six fashion magazines and their online homepages was conducted, and finally an online survey was completed so that a deeper understanding of how women in this age bracket feel about their own bodies could be obtained. Theories of social comparison and objectification were also called upon to allow for an accurate understanding of the obscure issue at hand to be obtained.

The results in general show that the images of the thin-ideal depicted in fashion magazines and their online homepages do contribute to the development of disordered eating behaviours among women between the ages of 15 and 45, but they do so indirectly. Other issues, such as women's social and environmental circumstances, must be examined too. The findings of this dissertation show that many women within this age group are discontent with their bodies and objectify themselves against media images; therefore, although the present research is worthwhile further work must be done in order to discover a policy that could combat this problem, in an attempt to stop the development of disordered eating behaviours.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	6
LITERATURE REVIEW.....	10
<i>1.1 Media/Body Image Relationship.....</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>1.2 Meta-Level Theory.....</i>	<i>18</i>
METHODOLOGY.....	22
<i>2.1 Research Design.....</i>	<i>22</i>
<i>2.2 Literature Review.....</i>	<i>23</i>
<i>2.3 Content Analysis.....</i>	<i>24</i>
<i>2.4 Survey.....</i>	<i>28</i>
RESEARCH FINDINGS.....	31
<i>3.1 Content Analysis Findings.....</i>	<i>32</i>
<i>3.2 Survey Findings.....</i>	<i>37</i>
DISCUSSION.....	45
<i>4.1 Overview.....</i>	<i>45</i>
<i>4.2 Common Themes.....</i>	<i>46</i>
<i>4.3 Limitations and Suggestions for Further Work.....</i>	<i>53</i>
CONCLUSION.....	56
<i>5.1 Answering the research questions.....</i>	<i>56</i>
<i>5.2 Research summary.....</i>	<i>59</i>
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	60
APPENDICES.....	69

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INTRODUCTION

This dissertation asks the question: *Does image-focussed media contribute to the development of disordered eating behaviours among women between the ages of 15 and 45?* There are three sub-questions put forward also to aid in answering the question critically and clearly. They are as follows:

- (i) *Do fashion magazines and their online counterparts induce self-objectification among women aged 15-45?*
- (ii) *Do the images in fashion magazines and their online versions directly contribute to the development of disordered eating behaviours among women between the ages of 15 and 45?*
- (iii) *Do the images in fashion magazines and their online versions contribute to social comparison among this age group?*

Much research has been done on the topic of female body image and its influences. The phrase “normative discontentment” was coined to describe the pervasive feelings that women experience towards their bodies in present culture. Body image concerns involve disturbances in how one views their appearance, dissatisfaction with one’s body, or the overvaluation of one’s appearance in defining their sense of self. Women are exposed to the social representations of the female body through various forms of media, which are a conveyor of the beauty ideal of thinness (Striegel-Moore and Franko, 2008).

Mass media are a powerful source in the promotion of the thin-ideal and aesthetic beauty for young women. Being exposed to images of the thin-ideal can change the attitudes, values and beliefs of women about their body image (Lopez-Guimera, Levine, Sanchez-Carracedo and Fauquet, 2010; Veldhuis, Konjin and Seidell, 2014; Conlin and Bissell, 2014). Repeated exposure to these idealised images can lead to internalisation.

The idealised body images shown within media are linked to unrealistic body aspirations and numerous other pathological issues such as dieting, depression and eating disorders (Knobloch-Westerwich and Crane, 2012). These links are developed further in this dissertation. Mass media are a primary socialising agent and transmitter of information. For this reason and for the fact that accessibility of media images in western society is on the increase (Lopez-Guimera et al., 2010), partly due to the shift to digital, it is important to research the harmful and dangerous effects that the media can have on young women. These effects can be both direct and indirect.

This research project sets out to draw attention to the prominent issue of the depiction of thin-ideal images within the media, with particular attention to fashion magazines and their online homepages. Media surveys indicate that fashion magazines are read by up to 83% of women (Tiggemann and Boundy, 2008). Through the main research question and accompanying sub-questions, the issue of the media's influence on young women's body image is discussed. Fashion magazines and their online counterparts are a type of media laden with images of the thin-ideal, and exposure to these images can have damaging effects, which will be explored. Issues of internalisation, body dissatisfaction, self-objectification and eating disorders are a number of the effects that are discussed. As this can be a complex issue, theories of social comparison and objectification are drawn upon to help better understand how these images have an impact on the way young women feel about their bodies, and primarily if these kinds of images can contribute to the development of disordered eating behaviours among women between the ages of 15 and 45.

The concepts of the thin-ideal, internalisation, objectification and disordered eating behaviours are used throughout this work. The thin-ideal can be described as the current societal standard of beauty and the emphasis of the desirability of thinness (Tiggemann and Boundy, 2008). Internalisation is then the extent to which an individual buys into this ideal and accepts it as the social norm (Thompson and Stice, 2001; Veldhuis et al., 2014). Objectification is the internalising of an observer's perspective as the primary view of their physical selves, which can lead to habitual body monitoring (Fredrickson and Roberts, 1997). Disordered eating behaviours include a wide umbrella of issues ranging from body dissatisfaction, mental health

issues, dieting, and bulimic symptomology, among others (Bessenoff, 2006; Thompson and Stice, 2001; Tiggemann, 2002). From deep internalisation harmful effects can develop, which is the core aspect of this study. Therefore, these concepts are central to this research.

This work is merely a small aspect of the large and ever changing relationship between the media and body image. A lot of research has been done on this topic from the fields of media psychology, health psychology, eating disorders and mass communication to name a few (Lopez-Guimea et al., 2010). This study is done from a communication and journalistic perspective; therefore it does not address the work in medical terms. Although the research outlined in this project is interesting and current, many more areas could be studied such as other forms of media, how these images affect men, and the influence of celebrity culture. Further research could be done on how to combat the development of disordered eating behaviours also, perhaps through the studying of children's behavioural patterns.

Chapter one, the Literature Review, gives an insight into previous work done on the topic of the media's influence over the female body image. The literature review is divided into two parts and compares and contrasts all relevant literature on this topic. The chapter analyses the work of academics in terms of their strengths, weaknesses and relevance to this dissertation.

Chapter two is the Methodology section, and it outlines the research methods adopted for the purpose of this study. Each method of research chosen for this work is explained and reasoning's for the choice of methodologies are given.

The Research Findings chapter gives a breakdown of what was found through each of the methods implemented for this study. Trends in data collected are touched upon and the discussion for the findings of this study is set up.

Chapter four is the Discussion section where the research findings from the previous chapter are analysed in a coherent manner. It brings together the information gained in the literature review and the research findings sections. Critically these findings are discussed and answers to the research and sub-questions of this work are provided.

The concluding chapter ties together the overall dissertation. The achievements of this study are stated and an overview of the previous chapters is given. The contribution that this work has made to the knowledge of this academic field is also noted.

A limitation of this study was the time allocated to complete it. Had more time been available the content analysis and survey would have been more extensive adding more scope to this dissertation. This, again, leaves room for further research on this topic.

LITERATURE REVIEW

For the purpose of understanding this research question, it is imperative that both literature and theoretical frameworks relating to this field be analysed. The literature review is therefore divided into two sections: 1.1 looks at literature on the topic of the media/body image relationship. This section allows for the development of core academic perspectives and analyses the many facets of the media/body image relationship. Section 1.2 gives detail on two specific theoretical ideas, giving this research a strong foundation.

1.1 Media/Body Image Relationship

Media Influences on Body Image

Bierma defines body image as a person's subjective perception of how they think they appear to other people (2003). In other words, it is how an individual perceives his or her physical attributes when he or she looks in the mirror (Bale, 2008). Garner and Garfinkel et al. noted that by the 1980s a trend had established that depicted feminine beauty as being ultra thin, and this became the ideal female image (1980). It has since become a widespread consensus that eating disorders occur as a result of sociocultural factors, and the mass media are a contributing social pressure for women as they try to achieve extreme slenderness (ibid).

Crisp (1992) argued that there were two areas of sociocultural developments that led to the prevalence of body image: sexual relationships and communications and mass media. The mass media transmit ideas, values, norms, attitudes, and behaviours that socialise and construct the social reality of those who use them for a wide variety of reasons (Bryant and Oliver, 2009). As a means of socialisation, it provides both men and women with a wide variety of information, including how to look. There is a mediated norm for the female body image in present-day culture,

and it is characterised by bodies that are extremely thin (Hendriks and Burgoon, 2003). The idealisation of slenderness in women is often viewed as a product of a historical evolution that has occurred over the past century. Within Western industrialised cultures, there have been many changes over the years in the body shape and size that is considered attractive and healthy, especially for women (Grogan, 2008). Studies of the portrayal of the female body in the media have found that models became increasingly thinner between the 1960s and 1980s. For example, models in *Vogue* magazine became gradually thinner and even *Playboy* centrefolds became taller and leaner. In the 1990s then came the emergence of waif-like models with very thin body types, the kind that are seen in today's media (Grogan, 2008).

Hendriks noted that the mediated thin-ideal is present in mainstream media, and that the mainstream media are a source women turn to for information about how to look (2002). According to *Body Image and Advertising*, the idealised female body images presented by the media represent standards of femininity that are unachievable and unrealistic for most women to obtain. These images create frustration and disappointment for many women in Western society because they exemplify unattainable body standards, which can then lead to unhealthy eating behaviours (2000). For women in particular, media such as fashion magazines provide a societal standard of female beauty and emphasise the desirability of thinness (Tiggemann, 2002). Magazines reinforce cultural norms and values to women about body image and weight loss. They set a standard for how women should look and provide them with methods to achieve it. Not only this, but fashion magazines provide unrealistic expectations for women to aspire to because they use expensive computer technology to airbrush photographs, correct blemishes and hide figure flaws (Derenne and Beresin, 2006).

By depicting body image content, magazines have the power to shape the thought process of their readership; women's magazines therefore have the power to shape how women think about weight loss and body image (Conlin and Bissell, 2014). Magazines aid in developing the ideology of young women who read them. It has been studied by the Kaiser Family Foundation in America (2004) that magazines aimed at females have increased in number and availability in recent years. An estimated 33 million 12-19 year olds are spending upwards of \$175 billion annually

on them and being provided with a distorted vision of the world, and of how they should look. They also noted that the most salient content of magazines aimed at adolescent females was focused on appearance (ibid). Women are exposed to unhealthy framing of the body and they receive conflicting information about weight loss and body image through the media. They are exposed to the thin-ideal on magazine covers and throughout and these appearance frames make women more likely to experience shame about their own body image (Conlin and Bissell, 2014).

Body weight and beauty are often epitomised as representing success and social desirability in the media, especially in thin-ideal media which refer to media that contain noticeably thin female characters, such as fitness and fashion magazines. Thin-ideal media promote the idea that thinness is advantageous (Harrison, 2000). Slimness is seen as a desirable attribute for women in prosperous Western cultures, and is associated with self-control, elegance, social attractiveness and youth (Orbach, 1993; Bordo, 2003). It has been argued that this emphasis of the thin-ideal is a major contributor to current high levels of body dissatisfaction and eating disorders in women (Tiggemann, 2002). This is true for women of a variety of ages. In a study done on women between the ages of 16 and 63 by the Manchester Metropolitan University, it was found that all women interviewed reported dissatisfaction with and objectification of their bodies; with particular reference to the stomach, buttocks and thighs (Grogan, 2008). Body dissatisfaction can be described as the negative evaluation of one's body and the tendency to compare it to other people or to images (Bessenoff, 2006). Therefore the representation of the thin-ideal and the extent to which one buys into or internalises it should be discussed.

Thin-Ideal Internalisation

Park (2005) found that the body size of women seen in the mass media has been steadily getting smaller. Wiseman, Gray, Mosimann and Ahrens found similar results when studying the portrayals of female beauty icons from 1959 and 1978. They observed that over half of them met the medical criteria for the eating disorder anorexia nervosa (1992). Noting this, it is not surprising that body-image disturbance and eating disorders have since become a significant physical and mental-health

issue in western cultures. Internalisation of the societal standard of attractiveness has been proven to be a causal factor in this (Thompson and Stice, 2001). According to Thompson et al., thin-ideal internalisation “refers to the extent to which an individual cognitively ‘buys into’ socially defined ideals of attractiveness and engages in behaviours designed to produce an approximation of these ideals” (ibid, p. 181). It is thought to foster body disturbance because this thin-ideal is virtually unattainable for most women (Thompson et al., 1999). People internalise attitudes that are approved by significant or respected others, specifically agents of socialisation, therefore the media, family and friends. They reinforce the thin body image for women; the media in particular play a pivotal role by glorifying ultra-thin models (Thompson and Stice, 2001). When women compare their bodies with images presented in the media, they will invariably find themselves wanting. Repeated exposure to such images may lead women to internalise the thin-ideal, so much so that it becomes accepted by them as a reference point against which to judge themselves (Tiggemann, 2002). It has also been found that thin-ideal internalisation predicted increases in body dissatisfaction, dieting and bulimic symptoms (Stice, 2001).

Fashion magazines are a pervasive source of thin-ideal images. Cross-sectional studies have shown that the average amount of time women spend viewing appearance-focussed media, such as fashion magazines, is directly correlated to body dissatisfaction, drive for thinness, bulimic symptomatology and internalisation of the thin-ideal (Levine and Murnen, 2009). More research done on undergraduate women has compared magazine exposure, awareness of societal ideals about body image and the degree to which individuals internalised socio-cultural messages about body shape as indicators of body image impressions. This shows that adolescents use magazines as points of comparison (Wykes and Gunter, 2005).

Tiggemann analysed that the extent of reading fashion and beauty magazines was related to internalisation of the thin-ideal. This mediates the relationship between reading fashion magazines and body dissatisfaction (2003). In fact, in relation to perceived media pressure, young women have nominated the media and fashion models as the most potent sources of the pressure to be thin. In addition to this, women who have been diagnosed with eating disorders have often stated that the models in fashion magazines were a trigger for their disorder (Tiggemann, 2002).

This research supports the view that exposure to fashion magazines promotes internalisation of the thin-ideal. Stice and colleagues (1994) found there to be an indirect pathway between the thin-ideal standard and the experience of body dissatisfaction.

There is an opposing view to this, however, stating that there are moderating effects to the extent that one internalises the thin-ideal. These include prior body dissatisfaction, low social support, and age (Lopez-Guimera, Levine, Sanchez-Carracedo and Fauquet, 2010). These effects can lead to low self-esteem in women, which is an important internal factor to consider when examining body dissatisfaction as it can lead to further problems such as disordered eating (Kinnally and Van Vonderen, 2012). It is apparent that the media are a significant reference point for internalisation of the thin-ideal, but these other social and environmental factors should too be considered.

Self-Objectification

Sexual objectification of female bodies, specifically by the media, teaches women to internalise an outsider's perspective on themselves, such that they come to see themselves as objects to be evaluated by others. This tendency is known as self-objectification (Aubrey, Henson, Hopper and Smith, 2009). Individuals who self-objectify tend to define themselves in terms of how their body appears to others. This is very much a dehumanising view of the self and one that privileges how a person looks rather than how they feel (ibid). The role of sexual objectification in the lives of girls and women is an obscure concept. It can be argued that the sexually objectifying experiences encountered by girls and women in their day-to-day environments lead women to internalise this objectifying gaze and turn it on themselves. Therefore, they come to view themselves from the vantage point of an external observer (Calogero, Tantleff-Dunn and Thompson, 2011). "In contemporary patriarchal culture, a panoptical male connoisseur resides within the consciousness of most women: They stand perpetually before his gaze and under his judgement. Woman lives her body as seen by another, by an anonymous patriarchal other" (Bartky, 1990, p. 72).

Not surprisingly, exposure to sexualised or ultra-thin depictions of women in the media causes women to self-objectify. The media contributes to the culture of sexual objectification. It also likely provides a socialising function of self-objectification (Fredrickson and Roberts, 1997). The media encourages women to objectify themselves by emphasising the sexual objectification of female bodies. This intense focus on women's bodies and body parts provokes women to objectify their own bodies (Aubrey et al., 2009). A number of studies demonstrate that exposure to these thin, sexualised images of other female bodies increases women's negative perceptions of their own bodies (Calogero, 2004). It was also established that reading contemporary women's magazines for appearance and beauty advice has been related to further self-objectification (Kim and Ward, 2004; Morry and Staska, 2001).

Susie Orbach argued the point that women are taught from a young age to view their bodies as commodities. She explored how women's bodies are used to see products in Western consumer culture, and how the fact that these bodies are objectified creates body-image dilemmas for women (1993). "The receptivity that women show to the idea that their bodies are like gardens – arenas for constant improvement – is rooted in the recognition of their bodies as commodities. A consumer society in which women's bodies perform the crucial function of humanising other products while being presented as the ultimate commodity creates all sorts of body-image problems for women" (Orbach, 1993, p. 17).

Women who self-objectify are at greater risk of harbouring negative feelings towards their bodies, but are also exposed to issues of depression and disordered eating (Slater and Tiggemann, 2002). Noll and Fredrickson (1998) found that self-objectification was related to greater body shame, which in turn was related to eating-disorder symptomatology. Tiggemann and Slater also confirmed links between self-objectification and appearance anxiety, body shame and disordered eating (2001). In an effort to cope with external pressures to meet beauty ideals, self-objectification appears to be a normative view of the self for many women (Costanzo, 1992). It is the primary psychological mechanism that accounts for the link between experiences of sexual objectification at a cultural level, and the health and well-being of women at an individual level (Calogero et al., 2011).

Self-objectification is proposed to lead directly to several psychological and physical consequences, some of which are mentioned above. These consequences are known to occur at a disproportionately higher level among girls and women. They also come in the form of other harmful effects including decreased awareness of internal bodily needs such as hunger and fatigue, depression and sexual dysfunction (Fredrickson and Roberts, 1997).

Harmful Effects

Evidence from various studies in the fields of eating disorders, media psychology, health psychology and mass communication indicates that mass media are important sources of information and reinforcement of the thin beauty ideal and how to achieve it (Lopez-Guimera et al., 2010). As has been described, the media's representations of the thin-ideal can have harmful effects on young women such as body dissatisfaction, internalisation and self-objectification. Unfortunately, repeated exposure of these images can induce even further negative body perceptions and lead to eating disorders (Derenne and Beresin, 2006). Such eating disorders include anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa. Anorexia can be defined as self-imposed starvation where the sufferer develops an obsession with becoming thin and losing weight. Bulimia is characterised as a series of binge-eating sessions, generally followed by induced vomiting or the use of diuretics to rid the body of the food consumed previously (Robles, 2011). While body image is a psychological construct, anorexia and bulimia are behavioural syndromes and they are both closely linked to self-esteem and social stability (Wykes and Gunter, 2005). The dangers associated with these disorders are extensive. The symptoms and behaviours of eating disorders that sometimes develop in females include: tooth decay, cessation of menstrual periods, fatigue and fainting, dehydration, heart disease, bone density issues, kidney failure and gallbladder disease (Department of Health and Human Service's Office on Women's Health, 2000). Dittrich (2004) also made the point that of all psychiatric disorders, eating disorders have the highest mortality rate.

In a study done by Botta (2000), it was found that exposure to and reading of fashion magazines led to an increase in bulimic tendencies in adolescent women. This indicates a link between media images, negative body image and eating

disorders. Cory and Burns (2007) state that many women fail to meet the desired media thin-ideal and as a result they develop eating disorders. They also note that such illnesses tend to develop during adolescence and early adulthood. The increase in young women starving themselves, sometimes to death, has become a cause for concern in the areas of medicine, psychology and politics. As a result of this, in 2000 a meeting known as the *Body Summit* was set up to discuss the media's role in these young women's behaviours. It was found that the media disseminates ideas of what is ideal and that magazines depicting waif-like models were having detrimental effects on young women. This was then paired with the emerging self-destructing attitudes towards food (Wykes and Gunter, 2005). This evidence shows the correlation between media exposure and the development of harmful effects including eating disorders. In contrast to many existing studies, Bissell explains that disordered eating behaviours are no longer just found in young women and girls; in fact they are becoming increasingly prevalent in older women, in some cases occurring for the first time at midlife or recurring after years of remission (2004). In the cases of some older women, they become overly accommodating to age-related changes. They come to believe that their bodies are less competent and attractive, which in turn leads them to experience less bodily satisfaction and lower self-esteem (Whitbourne and Skultety, 2002). Allaz and colleagues found that many older women continue to engage in dieting, despite being a normal weight. This reflects the continued pressure felt by women to lose weight (1998).

However, as was the case with the internalisation of the thin-ideal, there are other views and opinions on this matter. It can be said that the media affect young women's body satisfaction levels indirectly, along with other contributing factors. These include: peer comparisons, social and environmental influences, and self-esteem (Kinnally and Van Voderen, 2012). The social context of media is crucial as it influences the way people interpret and are affected by said media (Milkie, 1999). Mere exposure to the images can cause dissatisfaction but is not enough to cause more serious harmful effects. It is the meanings attached to the images, the extent to which one compares their body to the images, and the size of the perceived gap between the idealised images and the self that need to be looked at to determine the effect of exposure (Grogan, 2008). Fashion magazines provide a plethora of images depicting the thin-ideal, and it is important that these images are examined from a

theoretical perspective to fully understand the effects that they can have. For the purpose of this study Objectification Theory and Social Comparison theory will be used.

1.1 Meta-Level Theory

Objectification Theory

Objectification theory was originated by Barbara Frederickson and Tomi-Ann Roberts. It provides a framework for understanding, researching and intervening to improve women's lives in a culture where women are sexually objectified, and women's worth is equated to how they look (1997). "Objectification theory posits that girls and women are typically acculturated to internalise an observer's perspective as a primary view of their physical selves. This perspective on self can lead to habitual body monitoring, which, in turn, can increase women's opportunities for shame and anxiety, reduce opportunities for peak motivational states, and diminish awareness of internal bodily states" (Fredrickson and Roberts, 1997, p. 173). It offers a formal and focussed framework for investigating the consequences of living in such a sexually objectifying cultural milieu that socializes girls and women to view and treat themselves as objects to be evaluated on the basis of their appearance (Calogero et al., 2011). Objectification theory proposes that sexual objectification of women's bodies encourages women to internalise an outsider's opinion of themselves; therefore they begin to see themselves as objects to be evaluated (Aubrey et al., 2009). Although there are many influences on self-objectification (interpersonal, cultural, social and biological), mass media must also be considered. Fashion magazines in particular sexually objectify bodies through the visual representations of models, and by the thematic context that emphasises the importance of appearance (Fredrickson and Roberts, 1997).

The theory conceptualises the types of effects that would be expected from sexually objectifying media exposure (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). When objectification

theory is applied to the context of image-focussed media, the process in which women compare themselves with the images they see becomes clear. A number of studies have demonstrated that various types of media exposure are related to body self-consciousness and self-objectification (Aubrey, 2006). For example, Morry and Staska (2001) found that for female respondents in their study, reading beauty magazines predicted an increase in self-objectification, and that relationship was mediated by the internalisation of appearance ideals. Orbach linked objectification and distancing of the body to the rise of anorexia nervosa, which she categorised as a metaphor for which women use their bodies as statements about their discomfort with their position in the world (1993). This thought is supported by objectification theory, which states that women's bodies are socially constructed as objects to be watched and evaluated (Fredrickson and Roberts, 1997). In a specific study carried out by Fredrickson (1998), female students were randomly assigned to groups and they were asked to try on either a swimsuit or a jumper; the swimsuit was intended to increase self-objectification. When compared, the swimsuit group had high levels of body shame, ate less when food was available and performed more poorly on a mathematics test. The data collected suggests that body surveillance can cause body shame and reduced cognitive performance. In addition to this study, over a decade of research on objectification theory has provided evidence for the development of dangerous mental and physical issues, such as disordered eating behaviours among women. This thereby empirically links self-objectification to more negative experiences and higher mental-health risks in girls and women (Moradi and Huang, 2008).

Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) offer a model for objectification theory that describes how its process is played out in women's lives, and how self-objectification can be potentially dangerous. The first step is cultural practices of sexual objectification (media, comments from social peers), next is self-objectification (internalised view of self as object), next is self-surveillance (habitual body monitoring), psychological consequences (body shame, appearance anxiety) and finally mental-health risks (eating disorders, depression). Although this model proves that self-objectification is heavily influenced by the media, it also shows that social factors come into play. Therefore objectification theory is not enough of a framework for understanding if image-focussed media can contribute to the development of disordered eating

behaviour among women. Social concerns must too be considered, and for that reason social-comparison theory will also be considered.

Social Comparison Theory

Social-comparison theory was originated in 1954 by Leon Festinger. According to Festinger people are constantly evaluating themselves, and do so by comparing themselves to others (1954). It examines how individuals evaluate themselves in relation to peers, groups, and/or social categories (Milkie, 1999). The theory proposes that we desire objective evaluations of our abilities and attitudes (Grogan, 2008) and that we, as individuals, tend to prefer similar others to engage in comparison with (Knobloch-Westernick and Crane, 2012). Originally the theory dealt with comparisons within groups and face-to-face comparisons; however, recently it has been recognised that individuals compare themselves to larger social categories, such as models in the media (Richins, 1991). There are two types of comparisons: downward and upward. Downward comparisons occur when people compare themselves to someone else and find the other person to be lacking. Upward comparisons are when people compare themselves to someone else and find themselves to be lacking (Kinnally and Van-Vodernen, 2012). Tiggemann and Slater suggested that “the process of social comparison may provide the mechanism by which exposure to media images induces negative effects” (2003, p. 50).

When applied to the context of media, social comparison denotes the process in which women compare themselves with images of the thin-ideal (Lopez-Guimera et al., 2010). These images generally project a standard to which women are expected to aspire, even though that standard is almost entirely impossible to achieve (Schooler et al., 2004; Thompson and Covert, 1999). Adolescent and young women who tend to compare themselves with the ideals represented in the media are more likely to show greater body dissatisfaction and disordered eating behaviour than those who do not engage in the process of social comparison (Lopez-Guimera et al., 2010). Evidence is plentiful for the negative effects of young women's social comparison with media images. A study done with undergraduate women who were already dissatisfied with their bodies showed that they tended to compare their appearances to a wide range of body-shape standards, including other students,

fashion models and celebrities (Trampe et al., 2007). Other research found that women who report comparing themselves frequently with other women, particularly women in the media, were more likely to show signs of negative mood and body-image disturbance (Schooler et al., 2004). Another study using female students, done by Milkie, stated that they found the images in magazines to be unrealistic and far removed from reality. Despite this, however, they found it hard to opt out of the comparison process (1999).

It is important to note that peers play a central role in the extent that women compare themselves with the thin-ideal presented in media such as fashion magazines. If young women have peers that consider thinness to be important, then they are more likely to value thinness and have lower self-esteem. Peers reinforce the thin-ideal, making it more likely that it will be embraced as reality (Kremer, Giles and Helme, 2008).

Social-comparison theory provides reasoning for why women internalise the thin ideal.

METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

This research project is a mixed-model design study which aims to understand if image focussed media contributes to the development of disordered eating behaviours among women between the ages of 15 and 45.

“Mixed methods approach...employs strategies of inquiry that involve collecting data either simultaneously or sequentially to best understand research problems. The data collection also involves gathering both numeric information as well as text information so that the final database represents both quantitative and qualitative information” (Cresswell, 2003, p.18).

The fundamental rationale for mixed method research is that it combines the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative analysis while also compensating for the weaknesses of both (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). The complementary strengths component should be noted. It says that all data collected can be used for potentially relevant purposes, for example in development, expansion, complementarily, triangulation etc. (Greene et al., 1989). A strength of mixed methods research is that it is designed to converge and diverge when necessary, in a way that results in overall usefulness. It has been stated, however, that more research needs to be done on the integration of quantitative and qualitative measures, and that this issue needs to be looked at further before being fully explicated (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie and Turner, 2007).

The quantitative data is gathered and analysed first. This is followed by the qualitative, building upon the quantitative findings. This sequential order is implemented in this study as it allows for a general understanding of the research in question, and then that analysis can be refined and explained further by statistical results (Rossman and Wilson, 1985; Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998; Cresswell, 2003).

As an extensive review of literature on the issue at the centre of this work has been done, the texts analysed are used as the groundwork for the research methods implemented in this research design. The literature review is used as qualitative research to give a full insight into the subject at hand in this dissertation. Content analysis and a survey are then done to test the findings of the books and journals reviewed to provide statistical or numeric information.

All data collected and obtained is used in various ways through the noting of text interpretations and key information, a coding sheet and online graphs.

2.2 Literature Review

Although it is technically not a research method, the literature review is worth noting in this section. McKee stated that a text is something we make meaning from. Analysing texts is a means of understanding the ways human beings in various cultures and subcultures make sense of who they are, and how they fit into the world they live in (2003). In the case of this dissertation, books and academic journals are researched to gain knowledge on the relationship between the female body image and the mass media. Analysis of these texts brings about new and versatile information on the topic. All texts are analysed equally and all information gained is considered. Key terms such as objectification, thin-ideal, internalisation and the importance of the role of fashion magazines are stated and described in the studied texts. Theoretical frameworks are also broken down and understood thoroughly so that they can be adapted for this study. All texts studied allow for various interpretations of reality to be considered. Notes were taken on all texts and these notes were then compared and contrasted. A deeper understanding of these texts allowed for a better rounded argument to be made, backed up by legitimate information. Without the analysis of the texts used in this project, the other research methods would be irrelevant.

The texts analysed provide the necessary information to formulate a coherent argument for this research question: *Does image-focussed media contribute to the*

development of disordered eating behaviours among women between the ages of 15 and 45?

2.3 Content Analysis

“Content analysis is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the context of their use”. It provides new insights, increases the researcher’s understanding of particular phenomena and informs practical actions. It’s a scientific tool (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 18). In the case of this study a content analysis is done on the images that appear in fashion magazines and on their online counterparts, as they are a form of image-focussed media. It is done for purely quantitative purposes.

Images in fashion magazines are examined to quantify how many times images of the thin-ideal appeared. Where the images appear in the magazine (e.g. within articles or as part of advertisements) is taken into account also. Reviewing literature on the topic allows for a greater understanding of the causes and effects of the thin-ideal, whereas the content analysis provides the numbers for how many times these images are portrayed. It is necessary to analyse these numbers as the information provides a clearer understanding into the complex issue of female body image. A more in-depth argument can be formulated, and inferences can be made, through the data collected.

Although there are differing opinions as to whether content analysis is a qualitative or quantitative, quantitative measures are best practice for this study. Silverman (1993) stated that content analysis a quantitative method. Berelson (1952, p. 18) also stated that content analysis is “a research technique for the systematic, objective and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication”. It is used to “tally the occurrence of wholly manifest content”, or to count the number of occurrences of specific content (Rourke and Anderson, 2004, p. 6).

By implementing quantitative content analysis on the images of the thin-ideal the frequency in which they appear is counted through specific coding. An identical

coding sheet is used for this process and the findings are easy to collect and make meaning from.

For the purpose of this study, six fashion magazines are analysed for three months, between February and April 2016. Three British and three Irish fashion magazines are chosen so that the research isn't biased or one sided. The magazines analysed are shown in Figure 1. In order to develop an even more comprehensive understanding of this form of image-focussed media, the online homepages of these magazines are also analysed for the frequency with which thin images appear. This is just done over the course of one month however, as the images online do not remain there for extended portions of time. Also, monitoring all six over a three month period was not feasible for the researcher, given the limited time frame of this study.

It is stated by Beccerra and Stuttts that the allure of becoming someone else, including changing one's physical appearance and body image, attracts individuals to virtual and digital worlds, and may be context specific (2008). Therefore, the examining of online homepages allows for a deeper understanding to be obtained for the reasons why women between the ages of 15 and 45 self-objectify, have a negative body image and furthermore, develop disordered eating behaviours.

Fig 1:

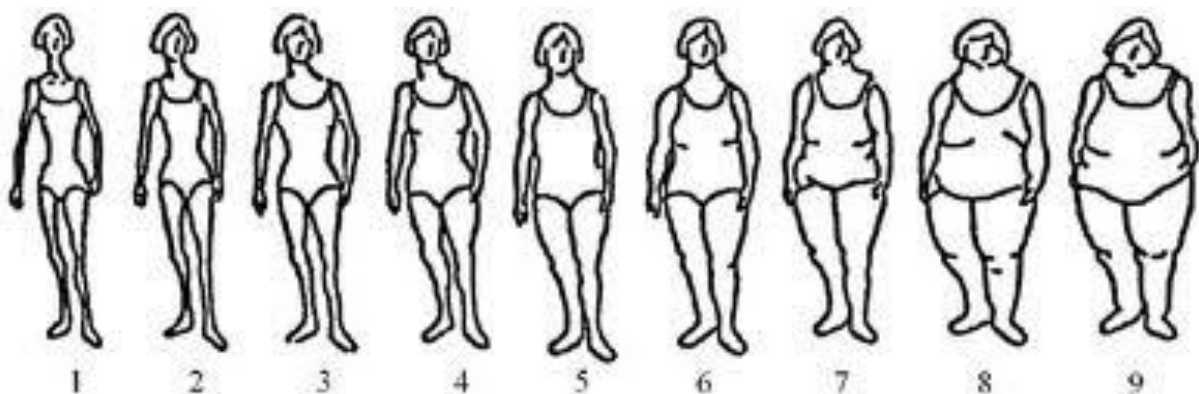
Magazine:	Issue(s):	Country of Origin:
<i>Elle</i>	February-April 2016	UK
<i>Glamour</i>	February-April 2016	UK
<i>Vogue</i>	February-April 2016	UK
<i>Stellar</i>	February-April 2016	Ireland
<i>Image</i>	February-April 2016	Ireland
<i>Tatler</i>	February-April 2016	Ireland

An identical coding sheet is used when looking at these magazines individually. Eight questions are asked of the magazines and their homepages to gain an insight into how many times the thin-ideal can be seen. The number of pages in each magazine is considered and noted also.

The Stunkard Figure Rating Scale is considered when carrying out this content analysis. It was originally designed to obtain information about one's perceived body image (Stunkard et al., 1983); and it's been used frequently as a measure of body satisfaction. The scale is considered to be unbiased and culturally fair. It is comprised of nine schematic silhouettes ranging from very thin to very obese, as can be seen in Figure 2. There are separate scales for males and females, but just the female version is implemented in this study (Cardinal, Kaciroti and Lumeng, 2012).

For this specific study, the Stunkard Figure Rating Scale is used as a comparative measure. The body types that are depicted in the fashion magazines mentioned above will be compared with the figures in the scale to determine if the models used are underweight, average weight or overweight. As this content analysis is being done to examine how often images of the thin-ideal are used in fashion magazines and on their online homepages, the Figure Rating Scale is a reliable device for recognising thin ideal images. Although it doesn't allow for a true weight to be obtained, this content analysis is based purely on images; therefore this scale is appropriate.

Fig 2:



Taking into consideration the definition of the thin-ideal provided by Tiggemann (2008, p. 91) as the societal standard for female beauty that inordinately emphasises the desirability for thinness, the images are examined. Content of the magazines is considered also but not to the extent that the images are. These images are considered as being the thin ideal/average body weight/overweight in reference to the Stunkard Figure Rating Scale. As per the scale, the bodies are split in three's. The first set of three are considered as thin-ideal bodies, the second set are considered average bodyweights, and the last set are considered as overweight bodies. The questions asked are as follows in Figure 3.

Fig. 3:

Questions Asked:	
1.	Is there an image of the thin ideal on the front cover?
2.	Do the majority of the images shown in the magazine depict the thin ideal? (i) How many times do you see the thin ideal?
3.	Do the majority of images shown on the magazine's online homepage depict the thin ideal? (i) How many times do you see the thin ideal?
4.	Do you see any images of women with an average body weight? (i) How many times do you see an average body weight depicted?
5.	Do you see any images of women with an average bodyweight on the online homepage? (i) How many times do you see an average bodyweight?
6.	Is the thin ideal shown mainly within articles or advertisements? (i) How many times was it shown accompanying articles? (ii) How many times was it shown in advertisements?
7.	Are there any articles about regular women?
8.	How many articles are on self-improvement? (E.g. weight loss, beauty regimes, exercises plans etc.)

These questions provide specific information about images of the thin-ideal, how much, and where they are seen in fashion magazines. This kind of information cannot be gained through the analysis of texts so this content analysis is extremely valid and useful for the current study.

All the information and numbers learned from the coding sheet are taken into account and percentages are made from the numbers given. Where more than one image of the thin-ideal appears on a single page it is just taken as one image. The total number of images of the thin-ideal is then divided by the total number of pages in the magazine and this is then multiplied by 100 to achieve a percentage. This equation gives the percentage of thin-ideal images in each magazine, and on each of their corresponding online homepages. These are presented in the findings section.

2.4 Survey

The second research method used in this study is a survey. Fundamentally, surveys are a matter of asking a series of questions to a sample of people from a population, and then using the answers provided to describe that population (Fowler, 2009). Again, it is a quantitative method.

The survey carried out provides statistical information about how the age group considered in this research topic feel about the thin images that appear in the media. The age group being considered, 15-45, is the range of ages that read the magazines being used for the content analysis. Statistics are an agreed set of conventions in which findings can be discussed in a constructive way (Rugg and Petre, 2007). Therefore, the statistics from the answers provided are used to construct the thoughts and beliefs of women aged 15-45 about the depiction of thin models in the media.

It was decided that twelve questions would be asked on the survey. This is best as the statistics are used as supplementary evidence and they provide an excellent insight into the issue at hand. The survey is created using an online tool, and the

wording of questions was carefully considered. Participants are allowed to partake only once, meaning that no duplicate responses can be collected. In addition to this, all participants remain anonymous, meaning that the survey is unbiased and cannot be manipulated. All survey data is collected and analysed online.

The primary purpose of this survey is to aid in testing the textual findings. It is the quantitative to compliment the qualitative. The analysing of studied texts allowed for the correct questions to be asked on the survey. This is advantageous as all answers given can be considered. It also means that if gaps can be seen or if there is information lacking in certain areas of research, the survey answers can fill that gap, therefore making this work unique and valuable as part of body image research as a whole. These answers then provide current statistics on the issues raised in the studied texts and the two can be compared and contrasted. This same purpose is considered for the content analysis carried out.

The questions asked not only stem from information gained through texts, but also with reference to the research and sub-questions at hand. Theoretical frameworks being drawn upon in this work have also been considered when writing up the questions. All questions are worded with consideration so as not to appear to prompt any participant. Simple wording has been used as some of the participants are as young as fifteen years old.

The survey is conducted online via the *SurveyMonkey.com* website, following the completion of the content analysis so that the focus is on one method at a time. "Masters Dissertation Survey: Women and Body Image" is distributed online via the social networking sites Facebook and Twitter. It will remain open for one week only so that there is sufficient time for the researcher to dictate the results.

Trends emerge and a full analysis of the survey results are discussed in detail in the findings section. The data being collected online means errors do not occur and statistics and percentages can be drawn up easily. Figure 4 shows examples of questions asked on the survey.

Fig. 4:

Examples of Questions Asked:	
1.	How often do you read fashion magazines?
2.	Do you aspire to look like the thin images you see in fashion magazines?
3.	On a scale of 1-10, how do the images in fashion magazines and their online counterparts affect how you feel about your body? One being considered as not affecting you at all, ten being that they affect you a lot.

Once all data is collected, results are analysed. Then the research question and sub-questions can be answered critically and thoroughly. All data collected in this mixed-methods model is used to provide an answer to the question: *Does image-focussed media contribute to the development of disordered eating behaviours among women between the ages of 15-45?*

RESEARCH FINDINGS

This section details the findings obtained from the content analysis and survey, conducted for this dissertation. Both methods added new data to the prime issue at hand in this dissertation: *Does image-focussed media contribute to the development of disordered eating behaviours among women between the ages of 15 and 45?*

The material discovered in the content analysis and the survey adds new dimensions to this work that previous studies don't have. Both methods allow for a deeper understanding of how women between the ages of 15 and 45 really feel about their own bodies, and allow for an understanding of what influences them to feel such a way to be obtained. The analysis of fashion magazines and their online pages was done as they are a salient source of thin-ideal images, and are considered as a type of image-focussed media. Although the age group considered for this dissertation was chosen because it is the ages of the overall readership of all fashion magazines considered, to remain consistent it is also the age range of women surveyed. As a result of this, and the nature of the questions asked in the survey, a comprehension of what leads women to develop disordered eating behaviours to be acquired, whether it be caused by image-focussed media or other external factors.

As previously mentioned, the texts analysed in the literature review section are used to test what is found through the content analysis and survey. The extensive list of texts provides worthwhile knowledge on the subject of what causes disordered eating behaviours among women aged 15-45. Therefore, that information shall prove valuable in assessing the research findings outlined here. The textual findings have been analysed previously in the literature review and will be discussed once more in the following chapter.

All other findings are laid out in this section, and provide the structure for answering the main research and sub-questions. The content analysis and the survey are considered separately here, but all information will come together in the discussion section.

3.1 Content Analysis Findings

The purpose of doing a content analysis for this study is to analyse image-focussed media, to see how many times thin-ideal images appear. Fashion magazines and their online homepages are the image-focussed media being considered in this case. This investigation of fashion magazines allows also for the counting of images of average sized women (as per the Stunkard Figure Rating Scale), the counting of articles to do with self-improvement, and the counting of where the image appears, i.e. as part of an advertisement or within an article. Therefore, it has an array of purposes for this dissertation. Again, these will all be considered in the following chapter.

As Hsieh and Shannon describe, content analysis is used to interpret meaning from the context of text data. In their terms, the content analysis done for this work is conventional content analysis, in that “its coding categories are derived directly from text data” (2005, p. 1277). For this study, six magazines are considered over a three month basis from their February to April issues, providing quite a wide scope. For the analysing of online homepages, just the month of April was considered. This is because of the quick turnover of images on these online pages, and due to the small time frame of this study. However, it still provides a strong insight into the kinds of images that emerge on these sites daily. British and Irish magazines are used so that more depth and validity could be gained from this form of research.

The coding categories are found within the text data because it is the images within the magazines and on their online homepages that are being counted. The numbers found through the analysis will aid in proving or disproving the textual findings displayed in the literature review. To avoid speculation of what is being found through the content analysis, an identical coding sheet is used for all magazines. The coding sheet examines if the majority of a magazine and their online counterpart is made up of the thin-ideal, among other questions listed above. Also, it should be noted that where more than one image of the thin-ideal appeared on a single page it was considered just as one.

The coding sheet is also used to analyse the images that appear on the online homepages of the chosen magazines. The online aspect of this content analysis adds a modern and current edge to this study overall. Although there is a vast amount of research done on the relationship between the female body image and the media, there is not much on the role that the internet plays. This allows for unique inferences to be made from this aspect of the content analysis. Melioli, Rodgers, Rodrigues and Chabrol found there to be a direct correlation between internet use and bulimic symptomology (2015), while Perloff found that there were links between social media use, body dissatisfaction and eating disorders (2014). This indicates that the internet has a part to play in the development of disordered eating behaviours among women between the ages of 15 and 45, so analysing magazine online homepages is important.

When images of the thin-ideal arose on the homepage, they were counted and statistics were made from these numbers, as was done with the physical magazine. The statistics for both the online and physical versions are shown on the following page.

The magazines used in this analysis included three UK magazines, which were *Elle UK*, *Glamour* and *Vogue UK*, and three Irish magazines, *Image*, *Tatler* and *Stellar*. Differences between the UK and Irish magazines can be seen in the analysis done, and are recognised.

The Stunkard Figure Rating Scale is implemented for this content analysis in order to have a logical and reliable scale, to deem what is considered the thin-ideal and what isn't. It was originally thought up in 1950 for participants in a study to choose the silhouette figure closest to their own body size and that representing their ideal size. The discrepancy between the two figures was seen as an indication of dissatisfaction, and the figures chosen indicated whether their ideal is thinner or fatter than their current body type (Grogan, 2008). It's proven to be an essential tool in the study of body image (Fallon and Rozin, 1985; Lamb et al., 1993; Tiggemann and Pennington, 1990) and when modified, is an ideal measure for this study. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Stunkard Figure Rating Scale is adapted in this dissertation as a reliable scale of women's body types. It's used as part of the content analysis as a way of deeming what bodies are considered to be a thin-ideal,

and what are considered as average. It adds a solid backing to the findings discovered.

The percentages of images of the thin-ideal in some of the magazines and their online versions were unexpected and provide for interesting discussion in the following chapter. Lower numbers than anticipated were calculated in some areas, and this allowed for different aspects of the research and sub-questions to be answered. The percentage of how much of each magazine is made of images of the thin-ideal is outlined in Figure 5, while the percentage of thin images on their homepages is shown in Figure 6.

Fig.5:

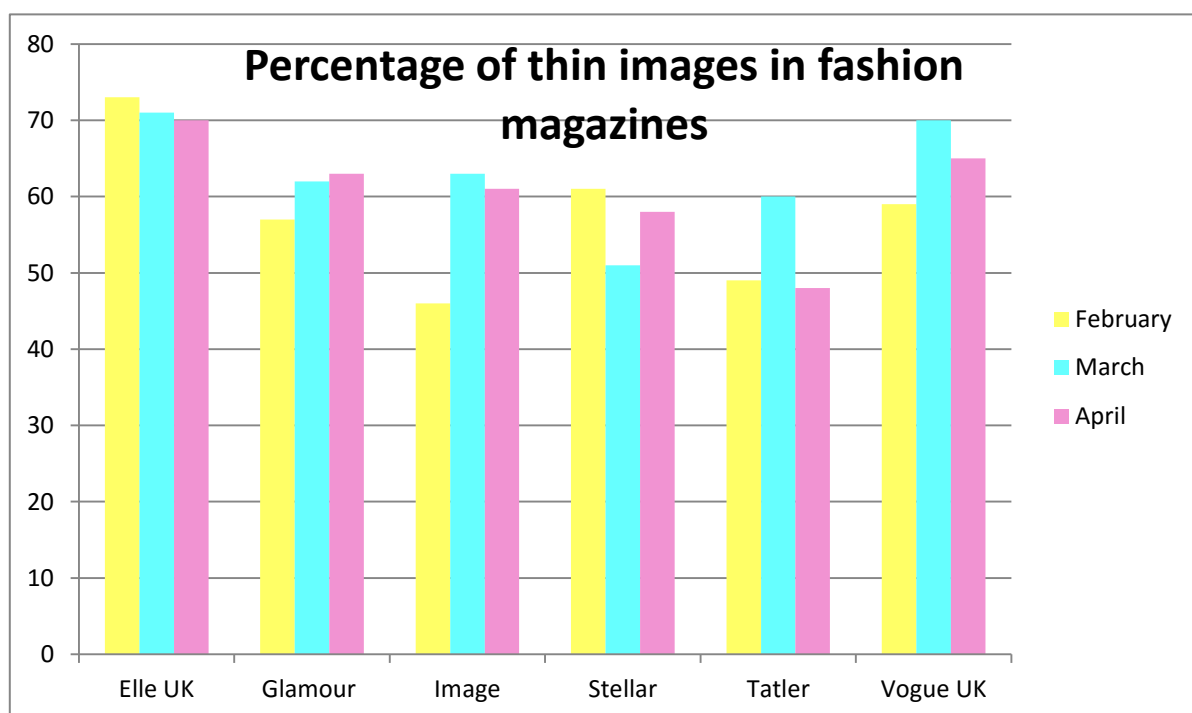
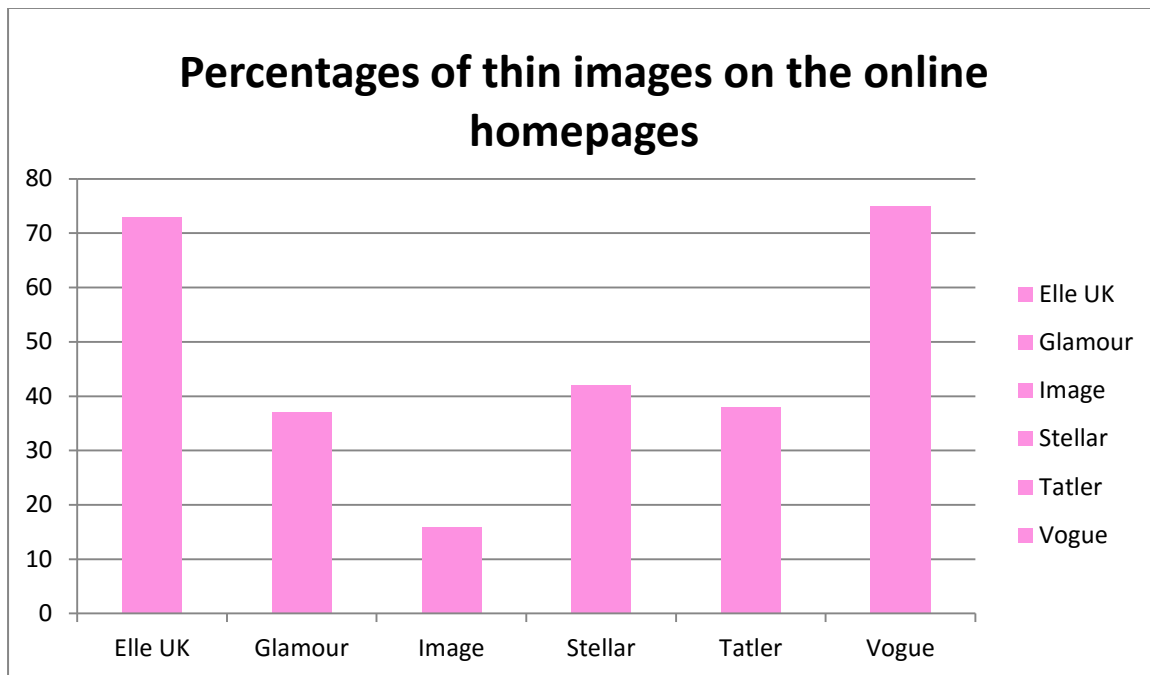


Fig.6:



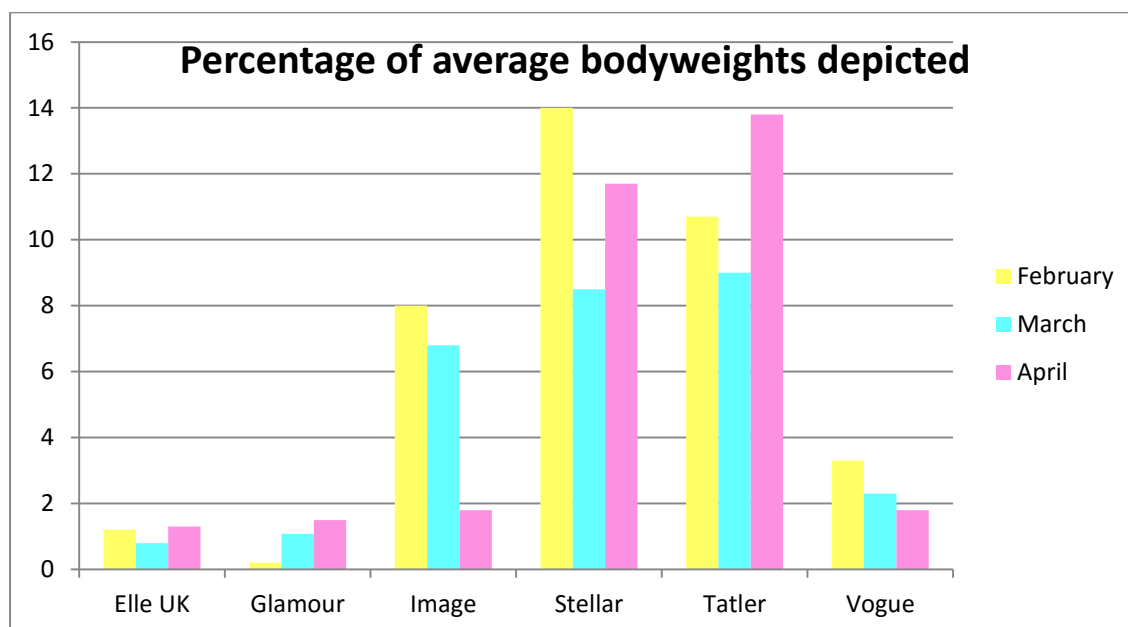
The result of the content analysis adds new information to much of the textual information analysed. As a lot of the previous research done looks at how harmful thin-ideal images can be when women are exposed to them, it is interesting to note the frequency with which they appear, and how this varied month to month.

In all magazines analysed, the majority of images observed were of the thin-ideal. Ranging between 46 and 73% of the magazines analysed being made up of thin images; the highest being *Elle UK* in February and the lowest being *Image* in the same month. The fact that some have larger numbers than others allows for further psychological and social factors to be considered when examining how and why young women self-objectify, and internalise the thin-ideal. These can then in turn help to formulate reasoning for how women between the ages of 15 and 45 develop disordered eating behaviours. These issues will be addressed when answering the three sub-questions of this project.

The content analysis done also found that all magazines analysed depicted images of women with average body weights, although the numbers were somewhat low, as shown on the graph below, Figure 7. The coding sheet asked the question, “*Are there any articles about average women?*”, and for all magazines except one, there

were. Echoing the low numbers in Figure 7, the maximum number of articles on average women was 10 (*Stellar*, March) and the minimum was 1 (*Vogue*, February). Again, these statistics can help to obtain reasoning for why and how disordered eating behaviours among this age group develop.

Fig.7:



It is worth noting where the images appear in the magazines, be it accompanying articles or as part of advertisements. In all magazines analysed the majority of thin-ideal images appeared accompanying articles. However, in the case of some, the amount was almost even. For instance, in *Vogue*'s April issue, 102 of the thin images can be seen as part of articles, whereas 90 are within advertisements. In *Elle UK*'s March issue, 135 were part of articles and 121 were in ads. and in its April issue, the numbers were exactly even, at 105 thin images appearing in each category. These findings provide a deeper understanding of fashion magazines and their layout, while also providing valuable information for further research.

This is a short account of what was found through the content analysis. They are reviewed somewhat and laid out here before being discussed fully in the following section.

3.2 Survey Findings

As stated in chapter 3, surveys are a matter of asking a series of questions to a sample of people from a population, and then using the answers provided to describe that population. The purpose of a survey is to produce statistics, that is, quantitative or numeric descriptions about some aspects of a study population, in this case women between the ages of 15 and 45 (Fowler, 2009).

The survey undertaken for this research project is used to give a deeper insight into how women between the ages of 15 and 45 are affected by images used in fashion magazines and their online counterparts, which is the primary concern of this work. The survey consists of 12 questions and is completely anonymous. Some of them require participants to tick a box, some require them to choose a number on a scale of 1-10, and some require them to make a comment. The 12 questions were made with the research and sub-questions in mind.

Reasons for the harmful effects caused by the exposure to images of a thin-ideal and further reasoning for the development of disordered eating behaviours can be ascertained through the answers provided in the survey. How women perceive themselves, in relation to the images shown in fashion magazines, and their online counterparts, can be understood also. By asking women the kinds of questions on this survey, their own subjective perceptions of their bodies could be gathered. This could not have been done through any other method of research, as it is quite a sensitive and personal topic.

The psychological problems associated with the portrayal of these thin images can be further understood in many of the participant's answers. Many of the physical issues are outlined too. Current statistics made from the survey answers are used in

the following chapter as current findings on this much studied topic. These numbers are then used to test the textual information laid out in chapter two.

There were a total of 204 responses to the survey, which was conducted online via the *Survey Monkey* website. The questionnaire examined women between the ages of 15 and 45, allowing inferences to be made for this age group of females. Many of the answers provided in the survey echo what has been previously stated in other texts or found in other studies. However, there is a vast amount of new wisdom that can be used to test what has been gained from past studies.

For example, 61.7% of those surveyed stated that they aspired to look like the models depicted in fashion magazines. This figure proves that women between the ages of 15 and 45 internalise the images that they see in fashion magazines. This is in agreement with Lopez-Guimera et al. (2010) in their study of thin-ideal internalisation as they state that prior body dissatisfaction can be a moderating factor in the extent that one internalises. This statistic can be used to understand both internalisation and body dissatisfaction, two issues that need to be understood for this research question to be explained fully.

Slightly over 65% of those surveyed were discontent with their bodies, meaning that out of 204 women less than half of them are happy with how their body looks. This figure is slightly concerning, and one that proves just how important research such as this is. Much of the work done previously on this topic found similar results when looking at just college aged students, but this figure accounts for women across a much larger age bracket. It's important to understand where this attitude comes from; therefore detailed questions were asked on the questionnaire so that accurate reasons for the development of disordered eating behaviours can be denoted.

When asked which phrase best described how the images in fashion magazines made them feel about their own bodies, 51.2% of the 204 women chose "*body conscious*", while a further 20.9% chose "*insecure*". Only 10.2% chose "*satisfied with my body*", with an even less 4.39% choosing "*happy with my body*". These figures too are validation for the thought that women in this age bracket experience body dissatisfaction because of the portrayal of thin images. Additionally, these statistics indicate that 15-45 year old women objectify themselves in relation to these images, as Aubrey (2009) found also. It can then be considered that objectification is a

contributor of disordered eating behaviours among the women in question in this current study.

A trend emerged when gathering the results that there was a general unhappiness among the women surveyed, with their body images. In addition to the statistics above, question 3 of the survey asked on a scale of 1-10 how the images used in fashion magazines made the women feel about their own body images. One was considered as not affecting them much at all, while 10 was considered as affecting them a lot. On average, participants answered 5.9 on the scale, meaning that the images in fashion magazines made the majority of women unhappy with their body image. A significant 72.06% answered between 5 and 10 on the scale, confirming that the media is a direct source of body dissatisfaction for women, and an issue that requires research, such as this study. The full figures for this question can be found in the appendices section.

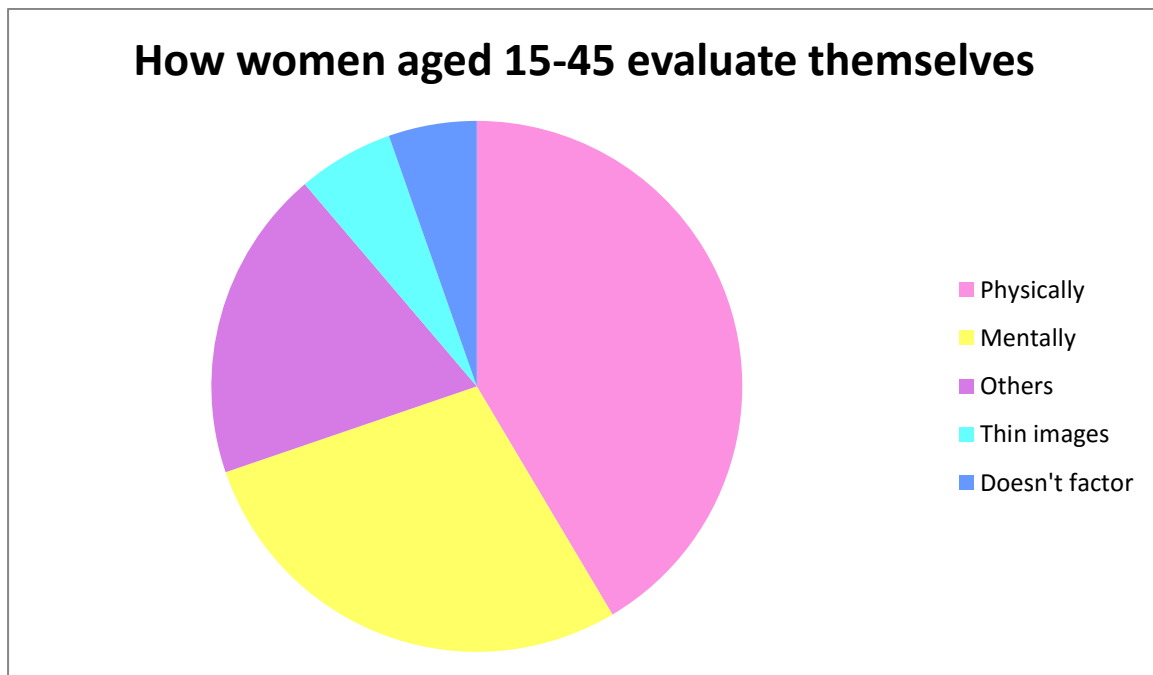
Corroborating this further, almost half of those surveyed admitted to taking extreme measures to be thin, such as skipping meals, taking laxatives, over-exercising or purging; 48.6% answered “yes” to this question. This figure does not directly indicate that women aged 15-45 engage in such behaviours because of the portrayal of images of the thin-ideal. However, it does indicate, once again, that other environmental reasons must be considered when examining the harmful effects that images of the thin-ideal can cause. These environmental reasons have been outlined in the literature review and will be discussed in relation to these findings in the proceeding section.

Despite women between the ages of 15 and 45 internalising and aspiring to look like the images they see in fashion magazines and on their online counterparts, they also feel that they are unrealistic for average women. Overall, 87.32% of those surveyed feel that the images are unrealistic, while just 12.69% feel that they are realistic or attainable. This echoes what was stated in *Body Image and Advertising* (2000).

When it comes to objectification, which is directly addressed in sub-question one of this work, the answer to question ten of the survey can be consulted. Individuals who tend to self-objectify generally define themselves in terms of how their body appears to others, they come to view themselves from the vantage point of an external observer (Calogero, Tantleff-Dunn and Thompson, 2011). As part of the

questionnaire, participants were asked how they evaluate their bodies, and they were given five options: *“In terms of how they feel physically”*, *“in terms of how they feel mentally”*, *“in terms of how others see them”*, *“in terms of comparison with the thin models used in the media”*, or *“it doesn’t factor in my mind”*. The majority answered *“in terms of how I feel physically”* but there was an ample amount that answered *“in terms of how others see me”*. The break-down of statistics can be seen in the chart below, Figure 9.

Fig.9:



These figures prove that a significant number of women aged 15-45 self-objectify, and also that they evaluate themselves in terms of how they look. This focus on physical appearance can be a contributing factor to disordered eating behaviours, as Tiggemann and Slater (2001) found.

Question 12 of the questionnaire lends possibly the most beneficial information out of all the research conducted. It asked those who partook to describe in one sentence how they felt about their overall appearance. Although some respondents

didn't answer this question, most did and gave detailed answers; others gave shorter ones and some answered with just one word, but all answers have proved invaluable for this study. The fact that the survey was answered anonymously meant that participants could answer honestly, and a clear insight into how women really feel about their body images could be obtained.

Many of the responses given express that they feel their bodies need improvement, some say that they feel pressure from the media to change how they look and others say blunt and despairing one word answers such as *“terrible”*, *“unattractive”* and *“inadequate”*. Some women alluded to the fact that they felt pressurised to look a certain way and to change themselves to fit into a mediated ideal, yet they wished they could be comfortable in their own skin. This is an intriguing point to note, and one that perhaps could be used as a starting point for further research. A sample of the answers can be read below.

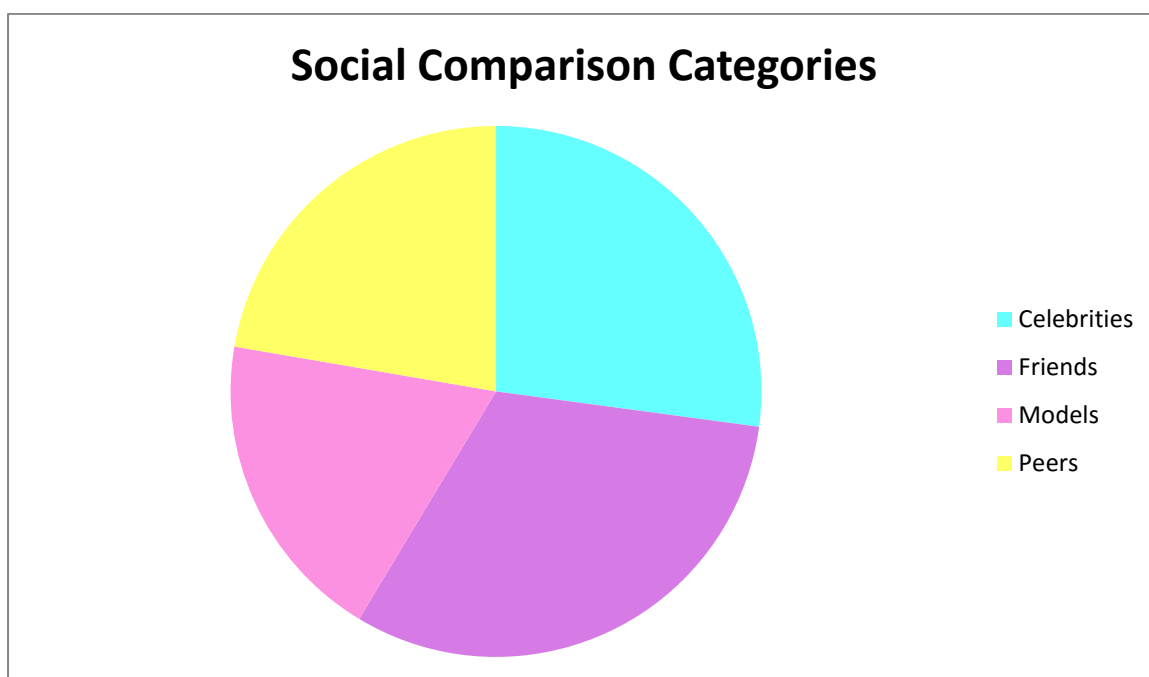
Representative sample of survey question 12 answers:

- *“I am completely unhappy with my appearance.”*
- *“I am overall happy with how I look, sometimes I fear of getting bigger based on images I see in the media but I find it is worth taking a break from social media to snap yourself back into reality and appreciate your body for what it is. Health shouldn't be perceived as being thin but happy with your mind, body and spirit for what it is.”*
- *“Should feel content however, pressure from models, TV, and movies have had a massive impact on me negatively.”*
- *“I feel as if I want to change a lot about it.”*
- *“I wish I were thinner but when I avoid fashion magazines and ads I feel better about myself.”*
- *“Honestly inadequate due to unrealistic images constantly circulating society these days, it's difficult for boys and girls to be confident.”*
- *“Low self-esteem when I go out with friends and conscious of myself at all times.”*

- *“I’m happy and content; no-one is perfect.”*
- *“I am constantly frustrated that I can’t love my body for the perfectly healthy way it is...it breathes for me, all organs work, and I luckily have all four limbs, but I don’t see that in the mirror. I see ‘unnatural’ lumps and bumps, ‘unusual’ stretch marks and ‘unattractiveness’.”*
- *“I’m satisfied until I see images in the media.”*
- *“I need serious improvement.”*
- *“I feel as if I can’t compete; yet I feel compelled to try.”*

In regard to the third sub-question of this work, on the issue of social comparison, a survey question was asked. When asked if body comparison is something that participants engage in, 82.8% said yes. This is a definitive answer that provides concrete evidence to add to the argument at hand. Social comparison is an active problem among females, comparing themselves to other women in various different fields. Participants in this survey were given an array of options to choose from for whom they compare themselves with, and the results were thought-provoking. Answers appear on the chart in Figure 10. This provides up to date data which contributes not only to what has been analysed on social comparison in general, but also allows for a deeper knowledge of Festinger’s theory of social comparison to be understood.

Fig.10:



Finally, a slightly underwhelming figure was found when the participants were asked how often they read fashion magazines. Given four answers to choose from the majority of the group chose the “*rarely*” option, with 16.8% even answering “*never*”. Eighteen percent answered “*often*” to the question and only 4.9% with “*very often*”. Interestingly, the statistics for looking at the online versions of magazines are somewhat similar. Eighteen percent answered “*never*”, 39% chose “*rarely*”. However, 29% said that they visited online magazines “*often*” and 13% said “*very often*”. These figures are curious and demonstrate an area that may require further research. Perhaps fashion magazines along with other dominant forms of media could be analysed as purveyors of the thin-ideal.

All of these figures help to build up the argument of this dissertation. They provide recent statistics which add to previous research done on the relationship between the female body image and the mass media. These survey findings paired with the findings from the content analysis of fashion magazines and their online counterparts, aid in answering the research question and sub-questions. Some of the findings have raised awareness to other factors that must be taken into account

when answering this research question. Although fashion magazines are a pervasive source of the thin-ideal, they alone may not be the cause of disordered eating behaviours among women aged between 15 and 45. This issue will be investigated further in the discussion chapter.

DISCUSSION

4.1 Overview

The aim of this dissertation is to investigate the question: *Does image-focussed media contribute to the development of disordered eating behaviours among women between the ages of 15 and 45?* The study aims to investigate how disordered eating behaviours manifest, and what factors influence this process. This is done through examining the findings from the content analysis and survey done. Theoretical frameworks of social comparison and self-objectification also are called upon, and past literature on the subject of the media and body image will be drawn on to make the study structured and grounded. This work aims to complement previous research by examining the extent of media exposure on the body images of a diverse group of women. It also endeavours to add original and contemporary data to the ever broadening subject of the media and body image. It is a specific study focusing purely on fashion magazines and their online homepages, and it provides an awareness of the damaging effects that image-focussed media can cause.

The content analysis done on fashion magazines and their online versions is used to see how frequently images of the thin-ideal appear. The results show that they appear a great deal. As magazines are ubiquitous sources of images of thin women, they contain a large number of messages about physical attractiveness for women, and these can have negative consequences (Strahan et al., 2006). Guillen and Barr (1994) found that magazines aimed at women tend to present traditional slim images of attractiveness. When investigating body image in *Seventeen Magazine* between 1970 and 1990 the authors concluded that the magazine contributed to the current cultural milieu in which thinness is expected of women, be they adults or adolescents. In the publications analysed for this study up to 73% of the entire magazine was made up of thin ideal images. This result, and the others discovered, are used to gain a deeper insight into the pervasiveness of fashion magazines and furthermore, their web homepages. The figures collected allow for a better understanding of the insidious nature of the thin-ideal and image-focussed media in general.

The survey carried out on 204 women between the ages of 15 and 45 supplies up-to-date opinions on the way women feel about their own bodies, and on how exposure to thin-ideal images affect them. Answers provided in the survey also allow for reasoning of internalisation and body dissatisfaction to be obtained; which in turn permit the comprehension of disordered eating behaviours. The statistics gathered are useful for comparing and contrasting with previous studies done on similar matters. Surveys done by Levine et al., 1994; Botta, 1999; Harrison, 2000; and Anderson et al., 2001, all found that girls and women who have higher levels of exposure to media imagery tend to be less satisfied with the way that they look than those with lower levels of exposure. The survey done for this study, and the ones mentioned above, all found that media exposure was mediated by social circumstances. “Magazine reading, social comparisons, and critical body image processing are important predictors of body image and eating disturbances in boys and girls” (Botta, 2003, p. 389).

Together, the findings from the content analysis and survey are used, while referring to past literature and considering theories of social comparison and self-objectification, to form a coherent discussion. Below, all findings are drawn together and plausible reasoning for this research project is supplied.

Common themes emerged when conducting the research for this study. Issues of internalisation, body dissatisfaction and self-objectification appeared in almost every previous study considered for research. All of these issues are harmful effects induced by the portrayal of the thin-ideal within image-focussed media- such as fashion magazines. In an opposing view, however, through the findings from both the content analysis and survey it appeared that other environmental and social issues must be considered to fully understand how disordered eating behaviours develop among women between the ages of 15 and 45.

4.2 Common themes

In order to provide reasoning for this research project the common themes that appeared will be discussed together and the chosen theories will be applied.

Internalisation, as Thompson and Stice (2001) found, is the extent that one 'buys into' the socially defined ideal of attractiveness and engages in behaviours which produce an approximation of this ideal. Tiggemann (2002) stated that repeated exposure to thin-ideal images leads women to internalise this ideal and accept it as the norm, or as something to judge their own bodies against. It's been proven that when women internalise the thin-ideal body-image disturbance and eating disorders become more prevalent; therefore internalisation is a developmental factor in disordered eating behaviours (Thompson and Stice, 2001). Fashion magazines portray the thin-ideal as something to be desired and therefore, internalisation occurs. In fact according to Ferguson, women's magazines may actually change a female's view of herself by teaching her socially acceptable ways in which to behave and look (1985). In chapter one it's explained that media effects build up over time through frequent and repetitive viewing. Therefore internalisation can be understood through the frequency with which the thin-ideal appears. The content analysis done for this study found that between 46 and 73% of magazines analysed were made up of images of the thin ideal, and between 16 and 73% of online homepages were made up of these images; therefore internalisation is influenced by the portrayal of these images in fashion magazines and their online versions. Also, in almost all magazines analysed for this study, the majority of images depicted were of the thin-ideal, providing a vast amount of bodies to emulate.

The large number of images depicted in fashion magazines and repeated exposure to them, teaches women to internalise the bodies as reference points for how they should look, and to then objectify themselves against. Objectification is typically defined as a culture's tendency to treat women's bodies as objects rather than active, autonomous entities (Fredrickson and Roberts, 1997; McKinley and Hyde, 1996). It is when one internalises an outsider's perspective of themselves. Self-objectification then is when one defines oneself in terms of how their body appears to others (Aubrey, Henson, Hopper and Smith, 2009). When participants were asked on the survey how they evaluated themselves, 19% said that they did so in terms of how others saw them, while a further 41% said that they evaluated their bodies in terms of how they were feeling physically. Nineteen percent is a relatively low figure here, but the fact that 41% admitted to evaluating their bodies in terms of how they felt physically suggests that internalisation of the thin-ideal still occurs strongly

among this age group. Furthermore, 13.17% acknowledged feeling “*inadequate*”, and 20.98% stated feeling “*insecure*” about their own bodies when they view images in fashion magazines. When these numbers are interpreted together it can be said that media encourage women to self-objectify.

Objectification theory offers a formal framework for investigating the consequences of living in such a sexually-objectifying world that socialises girls and women to view and treat themselves as objects to be evaluated on the basis of their appearance. In fact, self-objectification appears to be a normative view of the self for many women (Calogero, Tantleff-Dunn and Thompson, 2011). When this theory is put into practice for this work, the number of thin-ideal images counted in the content analysis must be considered. The answer to question three of the survey should too be contemplated. When asked: “*On a scale of one to ten how do the images in fashion magazines make you feel about your own body?*”, the majority of respondents chose seven, meaning that the images affected them greatly. As stated in the previous chapter, one meant that the images did not affect them at all and ten meant that they affected them in a negative way. When all this information is thought of together, it can be rationalised that the images in fashion magazines induce self-objectification in women between the ages of 15 and 45, to some capacity.

Ward (2003) found that in magazines aimed at young women, there is a dominant theme that it is important for women to attract men. Magazines act as socialising agents that tell women that they must be sexually attractive to men. They also provide a narrowly defined and unrealistic ideal that becomes internalised by regular women. This then results in body shame, which is a result of self-objectification. As was described in the literature review, the self-objectification process takes its starting point at the cultural practices of sexual objectification. Therefore exposure to these highly-sexualised images can result in self-objectification, when viewed repeatedly. Women are now socialised to accept the less invasive forms of sexualisation as normal. They are indicators that they’re fulfilling their expected norms as females. However, this acceptance can be dangerous for young and adult women alike. This kind of pervasive sexualisation may lead to self-objectification and its concomitant psychological issues, such as depression, anxiety and eating disorders (Smolak and Murnen, 2011).

Susie Orbach (1993) found that the objectification of bodies in this way leads to body-image problems for women. A number of individual survey answers denote this very clearly also. One respondent said: *"I am overall happy with how I look; sometimes I have fear of getting bigger based on images I see in the media,"* while another stated *"I wish I were thinner but when I avoid fashion magazines and ads I can feel better about myself."* Another declared that they felt pressurised to look a certain way because of the images seen within media: *"Should feel content; however, pressure from models, TV and movies have had massive impact on me negatively"* and another noted feeling *"Inadequate and unattractive"* because of thin-ideal images. These personal reflections prove that women between the ages of 15 and 45 self-objectify against the images used in fashion magazines.

It's also been proposed that there are strong links between self-objectification and disordered eating behaviours. Tiggemann and Slater (2001) discovered that self-objectification was related to appearance anxiety, body shame and disordered eating, as is also evident in this study from the answers given above. One other survey answer proved this very clearly. When asked: *"In one sentence, describe how you feel about your overall appearance?"* One respondent answered: *"Well I have had an eating disorder and body dysmorphia for the last 8 years, so not good."* The same respondent answered *"inadequate"* when questioned about how they felt about their bodies after seeing thin images in fashion magazines. Worth noting here too is that a significant 46.8% of women surveyed stated that they have taken extreme measures to lose weight, in order to resemble the women seen in fashion magazines. These answers reinforce the existence of body dissatisfaction and disordered eating behaviours among this group.

An attitude towards a longing for thinness appears to be a contributing factor for those surveyed in understanding the extent of internalisation, and the development of disordered eating behaviours. Social comparison is examined as 82.8% said that they have compared themselves with a friend, model, peer or celebrity, thus verifying that social comparison occurs among women across this age group. The media provides models for comparison purposes. Although this statistic doesn't directly tell us that all women between the ages of 15 and 45 compare themselves with images of the thin-ideal, it does tell us that social comparison occurs and this can be dangerous for the self-esteem of this age group, as researched by Van Vonderen

and Kinnally (2012). Low self-esteem can then contribute to the manifestation of disordered eating behaviours.

Likewise, Van Vonderen and Kinnally found that the lower a young woman's self-esteem, the more likely she is to experience some form of body dissatisfaction. Accordingly, should a young woman have low self-esteem the images in fashion magazines may induce further body dissatisfaction and internalisation because, as can be seen through the results of the content analysis, fashion magazines are a salient source of images of the thin-ideal. It appears then that the images in fashion magazines may not necessarily cause disordered eating behaviours to occur, but they can lead to an increase in them. Longitudinal studies by McCabe and Ricciardelli, Presnell and Bearman, and Stice suggest also, that messages transmitted by parents and friends have more of an influence on internalisation of the thin-ideal, on body dissatisfaction and on unhealthy weight-control behaviours than does the mass media (Lopez-Guimera et al., 2010). Grogan (2011) discovered too that mere exposure to media imagery may not be sufficient to modify body image. The meanings attached to the images and the extent to which a person compares his or her own body to the images, and the size and direction of any perceived gap between the idealised image and the self may all be crucial in determining the effect of exposure; providing yet another reason for why social-comparison theory was used in this dissertation.

Social-comparison theory examines how individuals evaluate themselves in relation to peers, groups and/or social categories (Milkie, 1999). Women are particularly inclined to compare themselves with those whom they perceive to be similar or to embody some ideal. This provides an explanation for the impact of peers on attitudes about appearance (Carlson and Jones, 2004; Lefkowitz and Gillen, 2006), as well as media figures (Harrison and Hefner, 2008). When applied in this study, social comparison is examined in relation to how young women tend to compare themselves with thin models in fashion magazines. Although many of the survey findings support the idea that young women engage in social comparison with images of the thin-ideal, 67.5% with celebrities and 47.1% with models; findings also support the thought that social comparison among peer groups occurs. The questionnaire found that over 75% compared their body images with friends. One response said: *"Insecure...low self-esteem when I go out with friends...conscious of*

myself all the time...I wish I looked better." It is obvious too that upward comparison occurs as over half of the women surveyed said that they aspired to look like the models seen in fashion magazines. This can be noted as confirming that internalisation of the thin ideal occurs among those surveyed, and also that social comparison mediates the extent to which women internalise. For example, Grogan (2011) found that women who have internalised the thin-ideal and who have a greater discrepancy between their actual body and their internalised ideal body seem most at risk of experiencing negative effects- whether it is models or peers that they are engaging in comparison with.

A contrary view on social comparison is that many women find the images in magazines to be unrealistic, but find it hard to opt out of the comparison process (Milkie, 1999). This thought is echoed in the present study as 87% of those surveyed agreed that model's bodies aren't realistic, but they still admitted to engaging in social comparison and aspiring to look like them. The wanting for thinness is embedded in the ideology of young women, even though many are frustrated with themselves for feeling this way. A number of survey responses recognise this frustration: *"I always wish I was thinner and more toned," "I get frustrated with it sometimes, but at least I have something to get frustrated over," "I feel like I can't compete yet feel compelled to try," "should feel content but don't,"* and *"I am constantly frustrated that I can't love my body for the perfectly healthy way it is.. It breathes for me, all organs work and I luckily have all four limbs, but I don't see that in the mirror - I see unnatural lumps & bumps, unusual stretch marks and unattractiveness."*

Tiggemann found that fashion magazines provide a societal standard of beauty and it emphasises the desirability of thinness (2002). This is apparent in the findings of this study also. Almost all survey answers given denote that thinness is an advantageous quality that women between the ages of 15 and 45 strive to achieve. These findings also tell us that images of the thin-ideal contribute to this attitude in a large way, because 72% of respondents admitted that the images in fashion magazines affected their personal body images. A further 51% stated that these images made them feel *"body conscious."*

By depicting body image content, magazines influence women's thought processes about how they should look (Conlin and Bissell, 2014). They provide women with a constant stream of information about how to look, and how to treat their bodies as items or commodities. As Orbach stated, "the receptivity the women show to the idea that their bodies are like gardens- arenas for constant improvement- is rooted in the recognition of their bodies as commodities" (1993, p. 17). This thought is on a parallel with many remarks in the survey. A number of respondents said that they felt as if their bodies were in need of improvement. In actuality, over 35% of participants used the word "improvement" in their answer. Examples of what some women said are: *"as most females feel, improvements can be made," "content but definitely able to improve," "satisfied enough, but could definitely improve with hard work," "in need of improvement,"* and *"I'm not perfect and I'm always going to keep trying to get the body I want."* This again proves that objectification among women between the ages of 15 and 45 occurs.

However, some of the women surveyed expressed that they are happy with their appearance, and are not affected by the depiction of thin-ideal images. This is something that has not been stated in any of the other studies reviewed for this work. These answers were very much in the minority, with just 25 out of 204 women answering positively about their bodies. Some survey participants even announced that they felt comfortable and content with their appearance. *"I'm happy with how I look," "I am a beautiful woman in all aspects," "I feel comfortable with my appearance," "I'm comfortable and content with not having to compare myself to others,"* and *"Happy and content, no one is perfect"*, among others could be noted. Although these opinions are far less common, they are useful for context. The fact that there are such few positive appearance comments made truly shows how vast and dangerous the issue at hand is.

In order to form an unbiased argument it should be stated too that although the majority of data gathered for this work indicates that damage can be done through the appearance of thin-ideal images in fashion magazines, average women are also depicted in the pages of this form of media. The numbers of average bodyweights depicted were far less than that of the thin-ideal, but the figures are still worth noting. The largest numbers counted were 21 average bodyweights and that was seen in the May issue of *Tatler* magazine, while 18 were seen in the February issue of

Stellar. In some of the magazines as few as 2 were recognised, such as in *Elle UK*'s February issue, or 5 in *Vogue*'s May issue. In general, larger amounts of average bodyweights were seen in Irish fashion magazines. This could perhaps be an avenue for further research, in order to analyse disordered eating behaviours among women between the ages of 15 and 45, in different countries. The levels per country could then be compared so that sufficient plans can be put in place to combat the problem.

As is abundantly evident, that there are distinct overlaps between the themes found. The implementation of the chosen theories allows for the development of these themes and for answers to be provided for the research and sub-questions. It is evident from this discussion that the images used in fashion magazines and their online homepages can contribute to the development of disordered eating behaviours among women between the ages of 15 and 45. The effects of image-focussed media are moderated significantly by social circumstances and prior body dissatisfaction levels. This echoes many studies done on the topic of the media and body image, as mentioned in the literature review.

The prime research question and three sub-questions will be answered directly in the concluding section.

4.3 Limitations and suggestions for further work

There are a number of limitations to this dissertation which could develop into further research projects. The time limit of this work unfortunately meant that not all angles of this complex issue could be tackled. Here, a number of them are considered but there is a lot more that could be learned about this ubiquitous topic, in a much more in depth way:

1. The low numbers found of those reading fashion magazines in the survey, and in fact their online versions also, could be an indication that other areas of media should be looked at. Digital platforms, photo sharing applications or even news sharing and social media applications such as Twitter and

Facebook could be examined. The majority of survey respondents answered that they read fashion magazines “*rarely*”, and this was the same for their online versions too, even though the numbers confirmed that these were looked at more than the physical copies. This statistic thus proves that there is a move towards online, and this should be investigated further.

2. For future research perhaps a more in depth survey could be done and/or a focus group, asking questions about not only media effects and how thin-ideal images make participants feel, but also more about their social groups, level of social support and peer’s opinion of thinness for example. That way the results could be more specific than they are for this study.
3. Another point of further research could be to test different theories such as Cultivation Theory by George Gerbner. As this theoretical framework states, television can provide people with norms of behaviour, including the appearance of women. It also notes that the more one is exposed to media images, of women as would be the case for this study, the more likely one is to internalise these images and use them to guide one’s own self-related attitudes towards how they look (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan and Signorelli, 1994). If this theory was applied to the effects of repeated exposure to the images in fashion magazines, a deeper understanding of how disordered eating behaviours develop could be obtained.

Cognitive developmental theories of gender role development could also be tested in relation to females and how they actively seek out female role models to evaluate and shape their own behaviour. In other words, women will look for information that shows them what it means to be a woman and a salient source of this kind of information is fashion magazines (Kohlberg, 1966).

4. A deeper engagement with the effects of sexualisation is another area of research that could be examined. Sexualisation includes personal and direct experiences that women have had with sexual objectification, in the form of men staring at them, men commenting on their bodies in an evaluative way, men touching them, and even severe cases where men have sexually assaulted them. This kind of sexual objectification and even sexual violence is rooted in the cultural interest in women’s bodies (Sheffield, 2007). Although sexual objectification is touched on in this work, more could be investigated to

understand the wider cultural reasons that women form these kinds of attitudes about their bodies, and then in turn discover more about why disordered eating behaviours develop in some cases.

5. The main point found in this work that should be developed upon is that a stronger focus needs to be placed on the contributing social factors that lead to disordered eating behaviours, for a clearer insight into how internalisation and body dissatisfaction begin. Undoubtedly these factors must be elaborated on for this controversial subject to be explained fully. By leaving out the effects of image-focussed media altogether, still a vast amount of valuable material could be gained from simply developing upon the wider social and cultural issues that contribute to the development of disordered eating behaviours among women between the ages of 15 and 45.

CONCLUSION

5.1 Answering the research questions

This academic research project asks the question: *Does image-focussed media contribute to the development of disordered eating behaviours among women between the ages of 15 and 45?* The previous chapters developed all the knowledge necessary to answer this question as core literature was detailed, research methods were described and all findings were laid out. Primarily, it is through the content analysis of fashion magazines and their online homepages, and a survey done with participating women between this specified age group, that an answer to this question has been discovered. Together with the primary research question, three sub-questions have been laid out in order to gain a deeper awareness on the complex point in question. The sub-questions put forward are as follows:

- (i) *Do fashion magazines and their online counterparts induce self-objectification among women aged 15-45?*
- (ii) *Do the images in fashion magazines and their online versions directly contribute to the development of disordered eating behaviours among women between the ages of 15 and 45?*
- (iii) *Do the images in fashion magazines and their online versions contribute to social comparison among this age group?*

Here these sub-questions are answered specifically, in accordance with what has been analysed in the previous chapter.

Do fashion magazines and their online counterparts induce self-objectification among women aged 15-45?

In relation to what was found on the issue of objectification, and the implementation of self-objectification theory in this study, it was discovered that the images in fashion magazines and their online counterparts do induce self-objectification. There are

mediating factors, however. As objectification is the process whereby one internalises an outsider's perspective of themselves, internalisation must be thought of here. The media provide a plethora of thin-ideal images, as was found in the content analysis done for this work, and women internalise these images, as too was proven through research undertaken. This internalisation and intense focus provokes women to objectify their own bodies. As 34.15% of women surveyed stated feeling uneasy with their own bodies after viewing images in fashion magazines, it can be said that self-objectification occurs in women between the ages of 15 and 45, due to the viewing of images in fashion magazines.

Do the images in fashion magazines and their online versions directly contribute to the development of disordered eating behaviours among women between the ages of 15 and 45?

It would appear that the viewing of the images in fashion magazines per se doesn't directly contribute to the development of disordered eating behaviours among women of this age group, but consuming them does; therefore again there are mediating factors to be considered. The survey results convey that body dissatisfaction exists among these women, and in some cases disordered eating habits have been observed. When social-comparison theory is applied here it became clear that social and environmental concerns must be studied to gain a full insight into what extent thin-ideal images can contribute to the development of disordered eating behaviours. The use of self-objectification theory in this study also showed the researcher that greater body shame was recorded when women between the ages of 15 and 45 viewed the images in fashion magazines.

The research done for this dissertation states that images in fashion magazines and their online counterparts alone cannot increase body dissatisfaction to a point that would allow for the development of disordered eating behaviours, but should the self-esteem be low in a woman already then yes, they can. Also if prior body dissatisfaction exists, as it does for the majority of those surveyed, then the images in fashion magazines can lead to further harmful effects manifesting, including disordered eating behaviours. Therefore no, the images in fashion magazines do not

directly contribute to the development of disordered eating behaviours among women between the ages of 15 and 45.

Do the images in fashion magazines and their online versions contribute to social comparison among this age group?

As developed in the Discussion section social comparison does occur among this age group, as the survey results prove. Many participants stated comparing themselves with the thin models shown in the images in fashion magazines, but they also stated that they engage in comparisons with friends and peers. To gain a better understanding, social-comparison theory was applied to understand how the comparison process takes place. Both comparisons with these images and with peers have been considered; however, it is apparent that social categories and environmental matters must be examined to fully understand the extent that one firstly internalises images of the thin ideal, and secondly compares themselves to these images.

As the theory proposes, women desire objective evaluations of themselves. When this is considered alongside the facts that women between the ages of 15 and 45 internalise and self-objectify, it is clear that social comparison among this age group of women occurs. Furthermore, when used in conjunction with the survey answers it's clear that the images in fashion magazines contribute to social comparison among this age group of women.

Again, it is not clear where the social comparison process originates but this further reinstates the notion that the social groupings of women must be observed and researched to gain a better understanding of this issue. As can be seen through the content analysis results, the majority of images in fashion magazines are of the thin-ideal and these have been proven to act as a means of social comparison. Therefore yes, the images in fashion magazines do contribute to social comparison among this age group.

5.2 Research summary

To sum up, it has been outlined that image-focussed media does contribute to the development of disordered eating behaviours among women between the ages of 15 and 45, but they are not directly caused by them. There is a distinct link between media's exposure of thin-ideal images and female body image attitudes, but other variables must be called into question.

Through this research project it has been discovered that more research needs to be done on the subject of the relationship between the female body image and mass media to understand the extent to which thin-ideal images induce harmful effects such as body dissatisfaction and disordered eating behaviours, and where body-image attitudes originate. Existing social and environmental concerns must also be examined independently too, so that a better rounded cause for the development of disordered eating behaviours can be discovered.

This realisation was found through the undertaking of this study and altogether this project allows for the phenomena in question to be developed further, thus expanding existing research. It is an ever changing and complex problem and it should be delved into more deeply so that these harmful effects can be attenuated.

In terms of this research question, fundamentally evidence confirms that image-focussed media does contribute to the development of disordered eating behaviours among women between the ages of 15 and 45.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Content analysis coding sheet

Fashion Magazine Coding Sheet

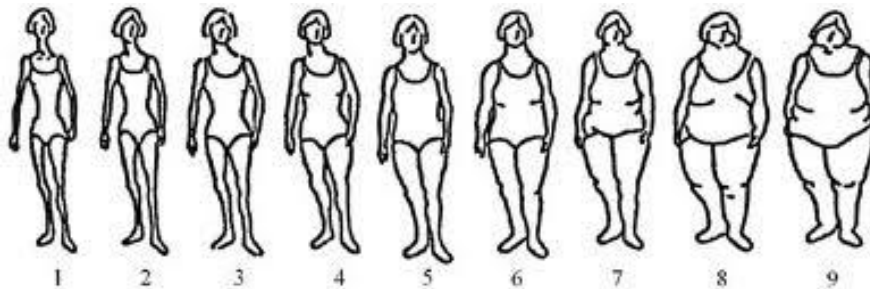
Name of magazine:

Month of issue:

Nation of issue:

No. of pages:

Is there an online version:



NOTE: The thin ideal will be dictated by the figures shown on the Stunkard Figure Rating Scale. Figures 1-3 shall be deemed thin ideal= thin frame, little body fat, slender. Figure 4-5 will be deemed as average bodyweight.

- 1. Is there an image of the thin ideal on the front cover?**

- 2. Do the majority of the images shown in the magazine depict the thin ideal?**
 - (i) How many times do you see a thin ideal?**

- 3. Do the majority of images shown on the magazine's online homepage (if it possesses one) depict the thin ideal?**
 - (i) How many times do you see the thin ideal?**
- 4. Do you see any images of women with an average bodyweight in the magazine?**
 - (i) How many times do you see an average bodyweight depicted?**
- 5. Do you see any images of women with an average bodyweight on the online homepage?**
 - (i) How many times do you see an average bodyweight?**
- 6. Is the thin ideal shown mainly within articles or advertisements?**
 - (i) How many times was it shown accompanying articles?**
 - (ii) How many times was it shown in advertisements?**
- 7. Are there any articles about regular women?**
 - (i) How many?**
- 8. How many articles are on self-improvement? (E.g. weight loss, beauty regimes, exercise plans etc.)**

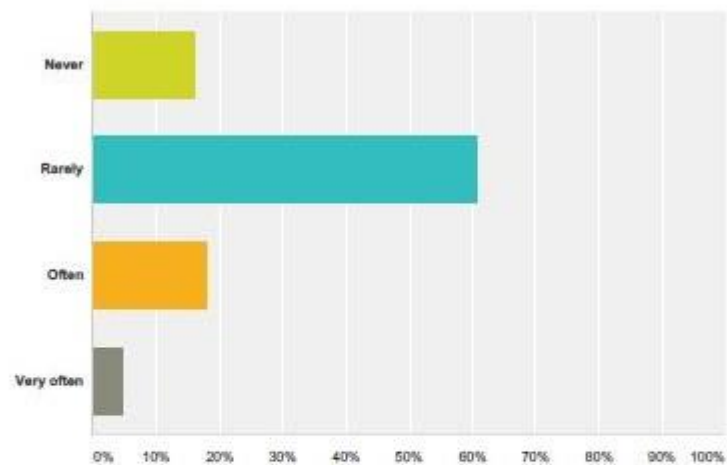
Appendix 2: Survey Questions and layout

Masters Dissertation: media and body image survey

SurveyMonkey

Q1 How often do you read fashion magazines?

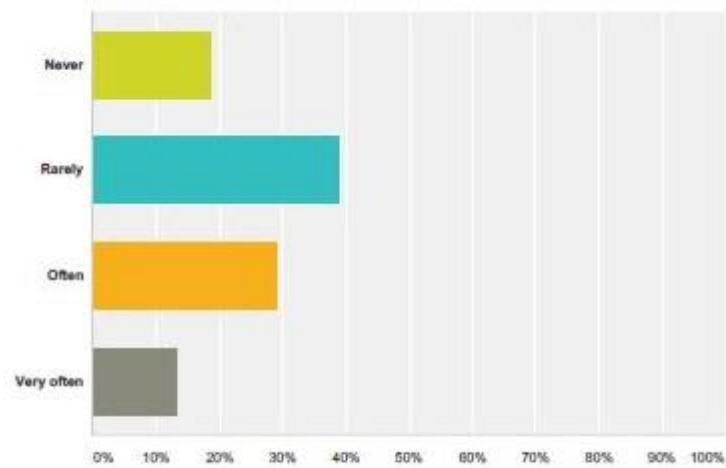
Answered: 204 Skipped: 1



Answer Choices	Responses
Never	16.18% 33
Rarely	60.78% 124
Often	16.14% 37
Very often	4.90% 10
Total	204

Q2 How often do you read the online versions of fashion magazines?

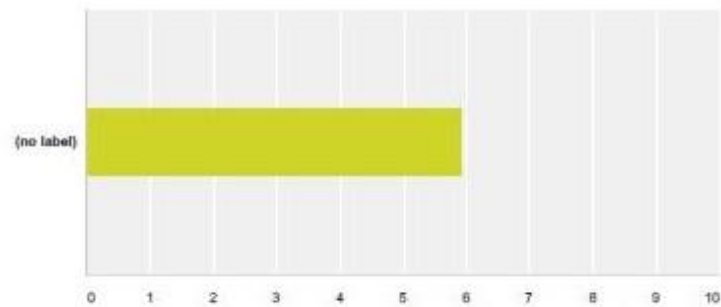
Answered: 205 Skipped: 0



Answer Choices	Responses	
Never	18.54%	38
Rarely	39.02%	80
Often	29.27%	60
Very often	13.17%	27
Total		205

Q3 On a scale of one to ten how do the images used in fashion magazines make you feel about your own body? One being that they don't affect you at all in terms of body image and ten being that they affect you a lot.

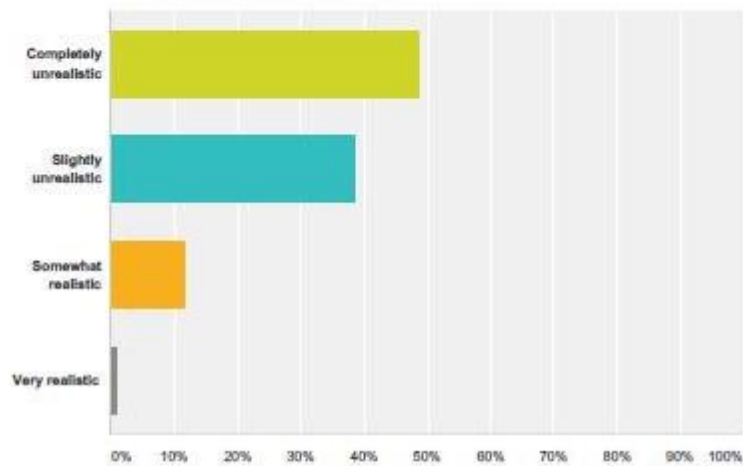
Answered: 204 Skipped: 1



	One	Two	Three	Four	Five	Six	Seven	Eight	Nine	Ten	Total	Weighted Average
(no label)	4.90%	5.88%	8.33%	8.82%	13.24%	15.20%	17.65%	10.78%	6.37%	8.82%	204	5.90
	10	12	17	18	27	31	38	22	13	18		

Q4 In terms of the average woman, how realistic do you think the images used in fashion magazines are?

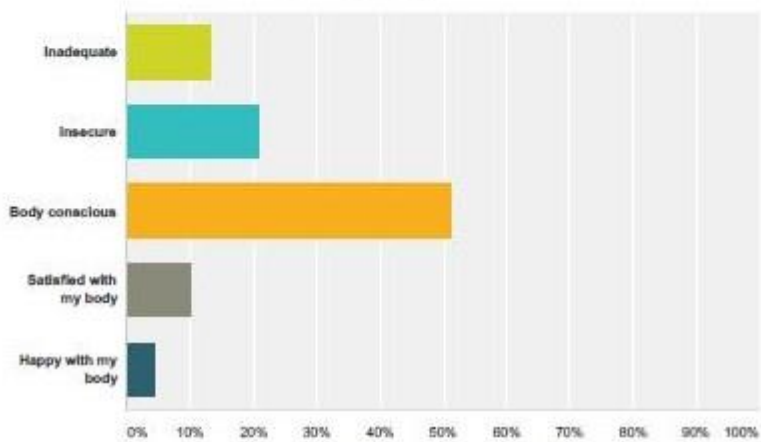
Answered: 205 Skipped: 0



Answer Choices	Responses
Completely unrealistic	48.75% 100
Slightly unrealistic	38.54% 79
Somewhat realistic	11.71% 24
Very realistic	0.98% 2
Total	205

Q5 What word/phrase, from the selection below, best describes how you feel when you see the thin images used in the media?

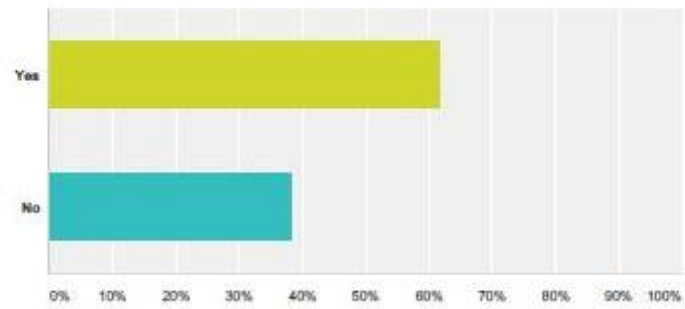
Answered: 205 Skipped: 0



Answer Choices	Responses	
Inadequate	13.17%	27
Insecure	20.98%	43
Body conscious	51.22%	105
Satisfied with my body	10.24%	21
Happy with my body	4.39%	9
Total		205

**Q6 Do you aspire to look like the figures
you see in the media?**

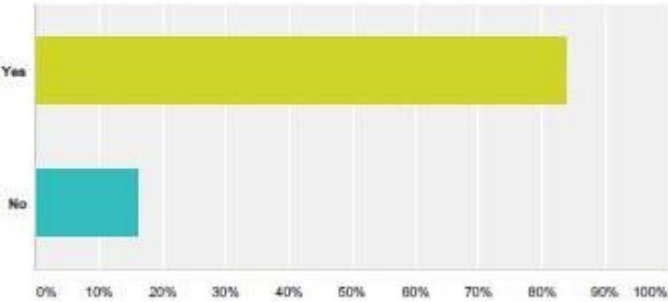
Answered: 204 Skipped: 1



Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	61.76%	126
No	38.24%	78
Total		204

Q7 Have you ever engaged in body comparison?

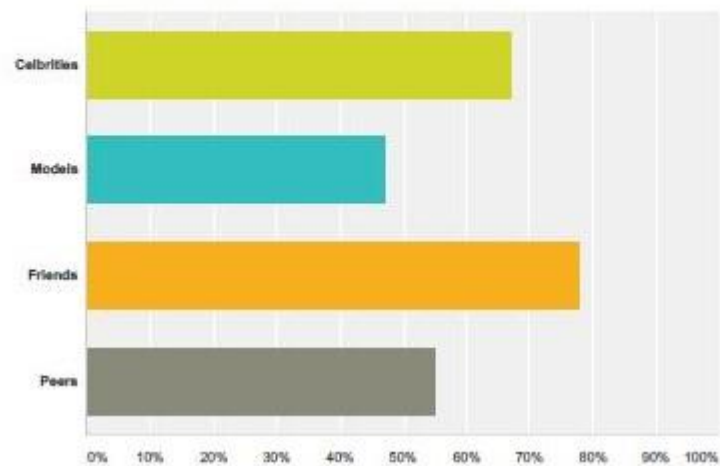
Answered: 204 Skipped: 1



Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	83.82%	171
No	16.18%	33
Total		204

Q8 If yes, with who?

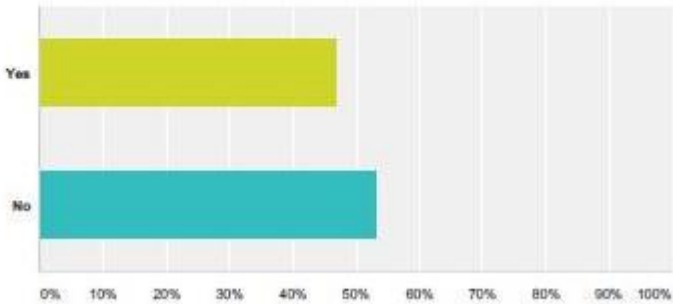
Answered: 176 Skipped: 29



Answer Choices	Responses	
Celebrities	67.05%	118
Models	47.16%	83
Friends	77.84%	137
Peers	55.11%	97
Total Respondents: 176		

Q9 Have you ever taken extreme measures to lose weight? (e.g skip a meal, taken a laxative, over-exercised, made yourself sick)

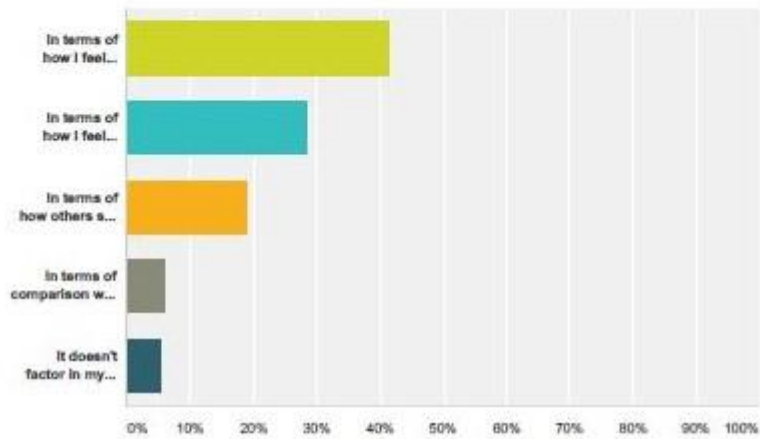
Answered: 205 Skipped: 0



Answer Choices	Responses
Yes	46.83%96
No	53.17%109
Total	205

Q10 How do you evaluate your body?

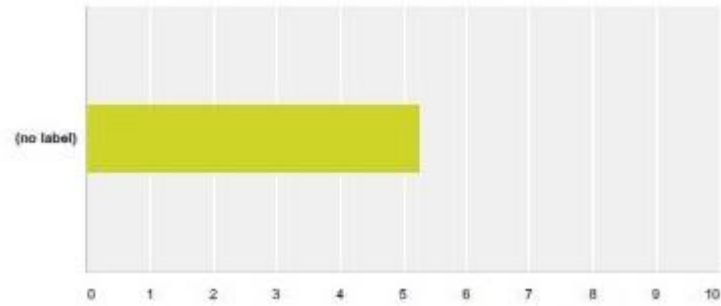
Answered: 205 Skipped: 0



Answer Choices	Responses	
In terms of how I feel physically	41.46%	85
In terms of how I feel mentally	28.29%	58
In terms of how others see me	19.02%	39
In terms of comparison with the thin images used in the media	5.85%	12
It doesn't factor in my mind	5.37%	11
Total		205

Q11 On a scale of one to ten how content are you with your body image? One being not content at all, ten being extremely content.

Answers: 205 Skipped: 0



	One	Two	Three	Four	Five	Six	Seven	Eight	Nine	Ten	Total	Weighted Average
(no label)	6.83%	5.37%	9.27%	12.68%	15.61%	17.07%	19.51%	10.73%	1.95%	8.98%		
	14	11	19	26	32	35	40	22	4	2	205	5.26

Q12 In one sentence, describe how you feel about your overall appearance.

Answered: 189 Skipped: 38

